

Housing Justice League Newsletter

January 2019

COLD WEATHER CRISIS

Atlanta Residents Demand More Warming Center Space, Decriminalize Houseless People During Severe Winter Freezes

by Richard Hunsinger

On Monday, January 7th, the first City Council meeting of the new year, a protest was held on the steps of City Hall to force the City to account for its inaction on opening emergency warming centers for Atlanta's unsheltered population. Winter arrived early to Atlanta in November, and the cold spikes have been rapid and volatile in the intervening two months. Outside of the existing network of shelters, the City is tasked with opening reserve shelter space for extreme weather conditions. The closure of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless (the Peachtree and Pine shelter) in late 2017 created a vacuum in shelter space that has yet to be filled. Last winter, the City opened two spaces during the freezes, Central Park and Old Adamsville. This winter, only Old Adamsville has been opened, and inconsistently at that.

Several long-time Atlanta residents and local grassroots homeless relief groups such as Atlanta Homeless Relief, the Georgia Streetgroomers, and Marshall Rancifer organized the protest and subsequent die-in



Supporters lie on the floor of City Council Chambers during the die in protest.

during the City Council meeting on January 7th. They took action to draw attention to the continued deaths due to hypothermia and related causes made worse by the lack of an adequate re-housing and shelter infrastructure in Atlanta. Last winter, upwards of 11 people died on our streets. This winter, there have already been 4 deaths from the cold.



Residents protest on the steps in front of City Hall, carrying crosses and protest signs. Photo Credit Lorraine Fontana

The ongoing demands levied at City Hall and from this protest are, as follows:

- *Open all the City's warming centers*
- *Increase the number of available warming centers*
- *Change the temperature threshold for opening the centers to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and weather criteria so they can be open and available more often, especially during inclement weather*
- *Create a city-wide transportation system to help people get to emergency shelters during these weather conditions*
- *Decriminalize houselessness*

The last point, to decriminalize houselessness, is especially important to the advocates as a critical point for the City to act on. Several city ordinances are specifically used to target the houseless population, including a long-standing ordinance that prohibits "moving household goods at night without a permit." Other ordinances are less oblique in their intent. One such ordinance bans "urban camping,"

giving police an obscene amount of discretionary power in how they deal with unsheltered people on the street. For example, that very "urban camping" ordinance (106-12) gives APD the power to deem items they see on the street "abandoned" as they see fit, effectively allowing them to steal the property of the city's homeless population every time they want to clear an encampment.

This problem is certainly not new to Atlanta. One need not go far in talking to anyone in this city to hear our well-known history of clearing out our city's unhoused population in anticipation of a lot of out-of-towner traffic. In the lead-up to the '96 Olympics, people were either given one-way bus tickets out of town or jailed in the Atlanta City Detention Center, built just for the occasion. Many do not expect much different from the city for the lead-up to Super Bowl LIII, to be held here next month. We already see evidence of this in the City's only warming center space being the Old Adamsville one. The Old Adamsville Recreation Center is located far from the downtown core where much of the city's houseless population resides.

Nor is the criminalization of Black people and other People of Color new at all to the South as a whole. 90% of Atlanta's houseless population is African-American, according to the houseless census conducted in 2017. One finds the use of these targeted ordinances to be immediately similar to the old codes passed by Southern legislatures after the Civil War in the Reconstruction era. "Vagrancy" laws were passed



A new system of institutionalized slavery found a home in our criminal “justice” system. As there were more free Blacks in the South looking for employment, “Black codes” and Jim Crow laws restricted what types of employment Black people were allowed to have, as well as their access to property-ownership. All of this was done to incarcerate people and force them into a new slavery that is still practiced today. One can easily see clear parallels in how Atlanta uses its own targeted ordinances to deprive the houseless population their own property and freedom.

Despite being offered an ordinance to repeal the criminalization of “moving household

goods at night,” drafted by current candidate for City Council seat District 3 and long-time housing advocate and activist Matthew Cardinale, no such action was taken by City Council on this issue at the meeting. Nor was there action taken to expand the existing and inadequate warming center capacity available to those who need it most.

Future actions will be taken, and those responsible for January 7th’s action will not stop simply because our local government has failed to act. **Follow Atlanta Homeless Relief and Georgia Streetgroomers on Facebook and Instagram for updates, as well as Marshall Rancifer on Facebook.**

Contribute to HJL's Newsletter!

We aim to have a collaborative, network-oriented and community-centered writing process that pairs impacted or involved individuals with volunteer writers/editors. We hope the stories we publish can thread together individual, building-wide, and city-wide struggles and explore their connections to broader systems of oppression and public policy. Some examples of this include commentary on policing, incarceration, housing instability, environmental justice, privatization of education and large-scale development, and the selling out of communities.

We are looking for: volunteer editors/writers to work with impacted individuals to tell their stories, individuals who are directly impacted by housing injustice to write their story or work with a volunteer to do so, written commentary on relevant issues, photos/ drawings/ comics/ etc.

You can find out Contributor Guidelines and Primary Purposes for the newsletter online at housingjusticeleague.com >> "News"

To contribute, go to housingjusticeleague.com >> "News">> "Contribute to the Newsletter" and fill out a short form.

Happy New Year!

Written by Natalie McLaughlin and Livvy Feeney

We've had another busy year here at Housing Justice League! At our holiday party on December 18th we reviewed our accomplishments from the past year. Here are some of the highlights:

Tenant Organizing Trainings: This year we launched monthly tenant organizing trainings to support tenants interested in starting and strengthening tenant associations in their buildings. In the trainings we share organizing and legal resources, and create a space for tenants to connect and learn from each other. This has been an important place for working towards a city-wide tenant movement to win safe and affordable homes and to better understand the power we can build in the face of racial discrimination, class domination in public policy, and violence against our communities. Through these trainings we have become connected with new organizations including the Briarcliff Summit Tenants Association, Forest Cove Tenants Association, and Peachtree Rd Highrise Tenants Association! Other tenant organizers that have been instrumental in making these trainings a success include residents from Capitol Towers/Capitol Avenue School, Veranda at Auburn Pointe, Trestletree Apartments, the Darlington, Stanton Oaks, and City Views at Rosa Burney, and more!

BeltLine for All Canvassing and Popular Education Workshops:

After working with Research Action to write the research report "BeltLining: Gentrification, Broken Promises, and Hope on Atlanta's Southside," volunteers canvassed neighborhoods to spread the word about popular education workshops on the results of the report. These workshops gave us the chance to have conversations about the displacement of historic communities of color that has already been caused by the BeltLine development, and

how we can work to prevent these effects as the development continues. We have also coordinated many petition drives for our Beltline4All petition.



Volunteers gather to canvass for the B4A Popular Education Workshops.

Renter's Rights Campaign - Eviction Defense

Manual: HJL's Renters Rights team has spent a whole year working on an eviction defense manual with both subsidized and prwithivate market rental editions. The manual walks tenants through the complex legal process of eviction, different opportunities for defense, and best practices for preventing an eviction. Fulton County has one of the highest eviction rates in the country approximately 500 evictions occurring every week. Understanding our legal rights as tenants and why the system is stacked against us can be a step in changing the catastrophic cycle of displacement that leaves many people sick, unemployed, disconnected from friends and family, and often homeless. We will print manuals in March/April as a tool to assist vulnerable families to build neighborhood networks to distribute this knowledge and gain power. Stay tuned to plug in!

Stanton Oak's Fight to Improve Living

Conditions: In February, Stanton Oaks Tenant Association had a victory when they rallied to get their security doors back. The owners of the complex, the Woda Group Inc., had removed the metal security doors from every unit's front door before a HUD REAC inspection back in October without any warning or explanation, causing a threat to residents' safety. The management company then brushed aside tenants' concerns for months. After the rally, the doors were back within two weeks! This is just one example of what a difference it makes when we stand together and shine a light on groups that will otherwise take advantage of us and ignore their responsibilities towards residents!



Stanton Oaks residents and allies rally at the Stanton Oaks complex.

No HUD Cuts Protests: On International Worker's Day (Tuesday May 1) Housing Justice League members and supporters rallied outside Senator David Perdue's office at a main intersection in Buckhead to protest Donald Trump's proposed cuts to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and demand the

senator vote against Trump's 2019 budget proposal that included the slashing of HUD programs across the board. The rally was part of a National Day of Action organized by the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT), of which HJL is a member. Fortunately the cuts did not go through on the scale we had feared but subsidized housing programs remain threatened under the Trump administration.

NAHT Conference: In July we had the opportunity to travel to Washington DC with HJL tenant leaders for the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT) national convention. This was our fourth year attending the conference which is a gathering of HUD tenant leaders from around the country along with tenant/community organizers and representatives from ally organizations. The conference is an excellent opportunity for tenants to share and develop strategies to preserve, improve, and expand affordable housing in their complexes and communities. Here in Atlanta we've learned so much over the years from the amazing HUD tenants that helped form NAHT. Several of them have organized such strong tenant associations that they have actually collectively negotiated with complex owners to purchase the building they live in!

Darlington Tenants Organize: In mid-September, we supported tenants at the Darlington Apartment Complex in Buckhead as they rallied to shine a light on their inhumane treatment by landlord Trace McCreary of Varden Capital Properties. Tenants were in a crisis situation as conditions were unlivable in the building and were told to leave the property in 60 days.



The rally at the Darlington drew important media attention to this injustice, which follows a pattern across the nation of displacing low-income people of color from their communities in order to renovate and raise rents to levels that only wealthier individuals can make.

Homes for All: This year HJL members attended two assemblies for the Homes for All network. The first took place in May and was an assembly for the newly formed regional network, Homes for All South. We were joined by a neighbor organization, Los Vecinos de Buford Highway, working with immigrant tenant populations just north of Atlanta. The assembly included a “tenant union training track” which was co-led by Homes for All Nashville, the City-wide Tenants Union of Rochester, and HJL. Focus topics included step-by-step process to building a tenant union, conflict resolution, addressing harassment from management, and scaling up to a city- wide tenant union.

The second assembly was the Homes for All national assembly (“#RenterPower2018 assembly”) which took place in Atlanta in August. It brought together more than 300 of Homes For All’s members, residents, and organizers from HFA member and ally organizations across the country to deepen relationships, begin developing long-term 10-year strategy for the land & housing movement, train on shared organizing models to grow the movement develop new skills through trainings.

Peopletown Block Fight: In Peopletown, the Dardens and Tanya Washington are still resisting the use of eminent domain for the removal of their homes to make way for a fancy Japanese-style park and pond. Nearly all of the other homeowners who shared a square block in Peopletown with the Dardens and Ms. Washington have sold their homes to the city. Important new evidence was uncovered: an email authored by a City of Atlanta engineer establishes that the City of Atlanta knew before it demolished 21 of 27 homes on the block that it did not need the properties for its proposed flood mitigation project. The Block Fight continues in the courts and HJL will continue to fight alongside of Ms. Washington and the Dardens until they win justice.

Redlight The Gulch: In early October, the City revealed their five billion dollar corporate Gulch development scheme, and has been racing to ram the Gulch redevelopment plan through with minimal community input. HJL joined forces with other community activist groups to counter this awful deal by organizing through the Redlight The Gulch Coalition. We organized a town hall event, multiple rallies, had powerful turnouts and public comments at city meetings, canvassed neighborhoods, and more. Now, we are fighting the scheme through the courts by challenging their proposed bond funding mechanisms. #RedlightTheGulch!



SEEKING VENUE LOCATIONS: We are seeking new spaces throughout Atlanta to hold mass meetings, tenant trainings, and other events. Spaces would preferably be wheel chair accessible, fit 30 people, have wall space to project, have free parking, be owned/managed by groups who support HJL's mission, and be free for the our organization to use. Have any leads? Email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com

Invitation: Redefining Affordable Housing Collective (RAHC)

Written by Stephen Molldrem

Members of HJL are invited to participate in meetings of the Redefining Affordable Housing Collective (RAHC). RAHC has been meeting every other week since September 2018. The next meeting is Wednesday, January 23rd at 5pm at The Phillip Rush Center (1530 DeKalb Ave NE) and every other week thereafter. RAHC is a diverse group whose mission is "to fight for affordable housing in Atlanta by building community power through political education."

RAHC is currently planning a major event in March to discuss the eviction crisis in Atlanta and is seeking additional partners. For more information, email Stephen Molldrem molldrem@umich.edu or join the RAHC Google Group at <http://tinyurl.com/RAHCGoogleGroup>

Looking Ahead to 2019 at our February Mass Meeting

We have pushed some of our 6-month work plan presentations to HJL's February mass meeting, so it will be an especially important one to attend! The meeting will include the presentations of several work plans for review and input by HJL's membership. It will be a great time to get a picture of where we are going in 2019 with important changes to our leadership and organizational structure, as well as the rolling out of the long-awaited eviction defense project. Our biggest goal for these presentations is to help HJL members think about where they fit into the work and collect feedback.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ to confirm time, location, and event details!

Wednesday, January 16th, 9am Redlight The Gulch Goes to Court **136 Pryor St.** Join us for the next court date where we continue fighting to keep the City from taking an enormous amount of our public dollars to build a luxury development. *Wear red!*

Wednesday January 16 - BeltLine for All Petition Drive **Old Forth Ward Skate Park, 830 Willoughby Way NE, Atlanta, GA 30312.** Join us on the BeltLine to collect signatures for our BeltLine4All petition! If you've never been to a petition drive before, we'll give you all the information you need to collect signatures with us.

Thursday, January 24, 7:00pm - HJL Contingent at the Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting for the Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 2 Master Plan Update **1040 Crew St SW 30315.** Join our HJL contingent at this upcoming ABI meeting to hold developers accountable to community needs and affordable housing promises.

February Tenant Organizing Training *Check HJL's Facebook page soon for a date/location.* How to start a tenant association, protect tenant rights to quality, affordable housing, and build power to stop displacement! Please email housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com to RSVP!

Tuesday, February 15, 7:00 pm, 6:30 pm for orientation - HJL Mass Meeting **1040 Crew St SW 30315.** We have postponed our 6- Month Work Plan presentations to the February mass meeting. We will present plans for our campaigns including the Eviction Defense Campaign, City-wide Tenant Union, and BeltLine4All. Come find out how you can plug in!

Wednesday, February 6, 6:30 - BeltLine for All Dinner and Dialogue **Facet Gallery 684 John Wesley Dobbs Ave NE.** Join us for a conversation about the BeltLine over a warm meal! Come learn more, ask questions, and discuss the effects of this development.



Housing Justice League (HJL) is a community-led organization in Atlanta, GA. Our mission is:

"To empower renters and homeowners to self-organize and defend their right to remain. We fight to preserve affordable housing, prevent gentrification, and build neighborhood power for an Atlanta-wide housing justice movement."

We are always looking for ways to work with and support community members dealing with housing issues. We are excited to hear your ideas and for new leadership. Come to our monthly meetings to join or start your own tenant association, volunteer for a campaign, or help with community outreach.

Go to www.housingjusticeleague.org to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, learn about membership, or check out our upcoming events!

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