



Housing Justice League Newsletter

February 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ to confirm time and location of events!

Saturday February 24
BeltLine4All Popular
Education Workshop
10:30 am @ 9 Gammon St.
SE. Come learn about
Housing Justice League's
resident-led research on
the impact of the BeltLine
on rising property taxes
and rents and what we can
do to protect residents
right to remain.

Saturday March 3
Canvassing Day - 10:30 am
Check our website for
location. Come out for our
canvassing day for our
BeltLine4All campaign! We
will canvass in a Southside
neighborhood to let
people know about our
upcoming popular
education workshops on
gentrification and other
ways to get involved.

Tuesday March 6 Tenant
Association Training 6:30
pm @ 75 Marietta St NW,
5th floor (near 5 Points
Marta Station). First tenant
association training of the
year! Focusing on how to
start a tenant association
in HUD-subsidized housing
and. **Please email**
[housingjusticeleagueatl@](mailto:housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com)
[gmail.com](mailto:housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com) if you plan to
attend!

Housing Justice League (HJL) is a community-led organization. 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.

TENANT ASSOCIATIONS

STANTON OAKS TENANTS RALLY OUTSIDE THEIR COMPLEX AFTER SAFETY CONCERNS GO UNANSWERED FOR MONTHS

Stanton Oaks Tenant Association, a member organization of Housing Justice League, held a rally on January 24 that was successful in getting the owners of their apartment complex to promise to re-install the tenants' security doors within two weeks, after brushing aside tenants' concerns for months. The owners of the complex, the Woda Group Inc., 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.



At the time of their removal, the Woda Group promised to replace the doors in a timely manner. But after taking the time to go through the different chains of command, writing letters, and meeting with local and corporate management, the Woda Group suddenly informed Stanton Oaks Tenant Association that they would not get their doors back. "As tenants we have a right to live in a safe space and after months of waiting for the Woda Group to take our concerns seriously we decided to organize a rally in front of the complex office in hopes to have the issue addressed. Many of us are living in fear every day," said the tenant association's president and long term tenant, Sherise Brown.

At the rally, tenants expressed deep concern about their community's safety without their security

doors and tried to bring awareness to their situation. Jacqueline Lawrence talked about how the door of apartment next to hers had been kicked in. "It was just tore up and the door was just standing open," said Lawrence. "It didn't take any time. They were in there in about a minute." When Lawrence made a report of the incident to the apartment management, the management tried to place the blame on her asking why she hadn't called the police, rather than recognizing the need for the doors' re-installment.

The Woda was able to get away with ignoring the concerns of the Stanton Oaks tenants for several months because property owners understand that tenants' rights often go unenforced in a society that privileges the interests of management companies and property owners with wealth over those with lesser means. Uniting with other tenants however builds power to draw attention to problems and get them resolved. There are many more tenants than landlords, and when it comes down to it, it is actually the landlords who are dependent on tenants for paying their rent. And with the rapid gentrification occurring in Atlanta and increasing profitability of luxury developments, it is more important than ever for tenants to protect their right to affordable housing. The Stanton Oaks Tenant Association's rally was a demonstration of collective power and it got undeniable and immediate results for tenants. Housing Justice League stands with Stanton Oaks as they continue working to address the need for safer lighting around the complex and other issues.

CBS covered the story! You can check it out here:

www.cbs46.com/story/37346395/cbs46-gets-answers-for-tenants-living-in-fear

BELTLINE FOR ALL CAMPAIGN

#BELTLINE4ALL CAMPAIGN HOLDS ITS FIRST POPULAR EDUCATION WORKSHOP

On February 8, Housing Justice League's BeltLine for All campaign held the first of four workshops in our BeltLine for All popular education workshop series. The workshop took place at Heritage Station Apartments in Pittsburgh and was attended by twenty or so people. Most of those in attendance were residents at Heritage Station Apartments and they brought with them their experiences, understandings, and frustrations with inequality and unjust development practices in Atlanta as well as other US cities.



The evening's discussion featured Housing Justice League's recent community-led research project which focuses on the development process of the BeltLine and the effects it is having on rising costs and displacement in low-income communities, especially in the Southside. The central message emphasized throughout the workshop was made clear: "You have to get organized!"

While issues of disinvestment and political marginalization in Southside neighborhoods are nothing new and are well understood by longtime Southside residents, Housing Justice League understands our research on the BeltLine as a way for residents to consider present-day manifestations of racism in public policy and the imminent threat gentrification is posing in Atlanta. In entering these conversations we understand that we are "preaching to the choir," as one Pittsburgh resident

put it. But we also know that as racism and exploitation are fought, they evolve to evade public awareness and criticism, all the while continuing the same basic function: maintaining the power of an elite minority and destroying practices of democracy that uphold political priorities of equity and justice.

For this reason, our workshop linked the historical patterns of racial segregation and disinvestment to present-day "public-private partnerships" that give power to private investors and break apart low-income communities of color. Historically, the federal and city governments channeled public money into the suburbs and deprived the Black "inner city" of needed public infrastructure and social services through practices like redlining, federally-backed housing mortgages for whites, and highway construction. In the 1990s the Atlanta city government destroyed public housing and began a shift away from public authorities control of urban development towards control by private investors. Alison Johnson, member and longtime resident leader with the Housing Justice League emphasized the loss of not only housing during this period, but also an organized political force of tenants who were able to make strong demands of local government. The destruction of public housing complexes was a direct attack upon the social networks and housing stability that helped make these forms of social and political organization possible.

Corporate elites pushed for policies that gave tax cuts to the wealthy and turned government-controlled public services over to the whims of for-profit private corporations. This was exemplified in the 1990s through the development of the Georgia Dome and the Olympics Stadium which had catastrophic effects for surrounding communities. Because cities lack funding and are controlled by for-profit interests, they rely more on "privatized" models of urban development that depend on attracting private investment. It is easy for investors to buy out black communities and make a profit because land is cheap from decades

of disinvestment and the government does not protect the poor against rising prices and displacement.

In our workshop, this information served as context for explaining the effects of the public-private partnership overseeing the BeltLine's development, which is spurring on patterns of gentrification and displacement on a large scale. The BeltLine is displacing residents at an alarming rate as rents and property taxes along its path shoot up, and its plan for developing affordable housing is far behind schedule. We are losing affordable housing in Atlanta at a rate far greater than the rate at which it is being built.



The BeltLine for All campaign team's goal is that this information can serve as an alert to the immediacy of the threat of gentrification in Southside communities and as a starting point for collective action on whatever residents identify as the most pressing issues that they want to take on. Following our presentation we opened up a discussion to talk about different concerns and what action the community might consider taking. We heard residents' own observations about the rapid changes occurring in Pittsburgh and other issues the community faces. One of the issues that came up the most was the train consistently stopping across McDaniel Street, blocking traffic for hours or even days at a time and disrupting neighborhoods blowing its horn often as late as

2:00 a.m. One senior resident commented, "I'd like to see that train not inhibit my health," explaining that the train poses a very serious danger to seniors at Heritage Station because it could cause a delay in getting to the emergency room.

Other topics residents raised were related more directly to gentrification. One resident talked about how she had noticed that the recently renovated homes near her are only for sale, with none for rent. "They are all for sale and many Pittsburgh residents are older and living on a fixed income. They are not able to start buying homes," she explained. Katrina Monroe-Pettway, a Pittsburgh resident and representative for the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyer Foundation, which specializes in unjust housing issues, spoke about an alarming number of contractor signs that went up all down her street just before Thanksgiving. Commenting on all the changes that have been happening, one person said her question is, "but are they going to be good for me? Where am I going to go?"

Towards the end of the workshop, many residents expressed interest in organizing to take on some of the issues residents of Southside Atlanta and Pittsburgh face, and many people asked for suggestions on what to do. To this HJL leaders' Alison Johnson and Deborah Arnold's response was, "you have to get organized." Alison talked about the historic importance of NPUs and tenant associations holding power in Atlanta and explained that an approach where HJL and other housing justice organizations across the country have found a lot of success is through tenant organizing. Tenant associations bring neighbors together to pool knowledge and strengthen trust and power within the community which makes organizing to address immediate issues within a complex possible, as well as broader issues within the community and the city. A number of attendees committed to attending Housing Justice League's next mass meeting to learn more about tenant organizing and our upcoming program that will offer more consistent training and support for tenant associations. The central message of the night, "you have to get organized!" was also emphasized by the audience when Alison asked the attendees what they thought they should do. Their answers were "all high rises should have an organization team" and "we need an organization!"



#BELTLINE4ALL CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES PETITION AND GETS 1,000 SIGNATURES

Go to <https://start2.occupyyourhomes.org/petitions/tell-policymakers-the-beltline-should-be-for-all-atlantans> to sign onto our campaign!

"We are in crisis. Atlanta housing costs are on the rise and we are losing affordable units at a staggering rate. Between 2010 and 2014 Atlanta lost 5,300 low cost rental units. Meanwhile, 32,000 people are on the waiting list for public housing. To solve this crisis, we must act now to increase affordable housing supply and protect low-income homeowners and renters.

The Atlanta BeltLine was supposed to help with this.

Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. is a public private partnership launched in 2005. The BeltLine, and its public sector partners and supporters -- particularly the City of Atlanta and Fulton county -- promised that 5,600 affordable units would be built as a part of the project. But almost halfway through its completion, fewer than 1,000 units have been built. Meanwhile, experts estimate that there is need for 10,400 affordable units in the Atlanta BeltLine area alone in the next decade.

Not only has the BeltLine failed to build affordable housing, but it has also directly caused housing values near it to rise between 18 percent and 27 percent more than elsewhere in the city. These effects are especially foreboding on the Southside where low-income black communities face the encroaching threat of mass displacement from Beltline development plans that have not even broken ground yet. Neighborhoods along the southwest segment of the BeltLine, which includes Adair Park, Pittsburgh, Mechanicsville, and Westview, saw median sale prices jump 68 percent from 2011 to 2015! With prices on the rise, existing residents will be pushed out. In the Old Fourth Ward where a section of the BeltLine has been completed, we have already seen the destructive reality of mass displacement.

The Housing Justice League of Atlanta recently completed a yearlong research project on the human impact of the Atlanta BeltLine, speaking with residents about what this context means for them. Since then we have launched a campaign to turn our recommendations into reality.

Atlanta's southside communities are fighting for a say in the development process in order to improve and preserve what is best in their communities and stay in the areas they know and love. These neighborhoods have seen broken promises and discriminatory divestment for decades. Recent examples include bypassing community concerns to push through Arthur Blank's Mercedes Benz Stadium and handing over the redevelopment of Turner Field to Georgia State University and Carter Development without a fair contract with the community in place.

"It is time to break this cycle: Communities on the Southside deserve to be a part of the process to shape and determine the neighborhoods where we live," says Alison Johnson, a Peoplestown resident. Nia Brown, a young adult born and raised in Peoplestown questions the inequitable development process which is currently pushing people out: "I just feel like, why should we have to move outside of our community so that they can make our community better?" Equitability requires low-income residents to be the focus of the project, not an afterthought.

The BeltLine development is nearly half done, and its legacy is still up in the air. We need Development not Displacement. It is unconscionable for a city with resources as great as Atlanta's to stand by and allow the continued extraction of wealth from historically marginalized communities. The City must prioritize human rights and stop funding destructive mega developments with our tax dollars. Renters and low-income homeowners must receive more legal protections and support.

We can move forward together and build more just and livable communities. We can heed the warning call of already gentrifying communities to do better for the people living there now and build a BeltLine for All. Gentrification is not inevitable. It is a matter of political will and taking a stand for housing justice.

Will you stand with us?"

OTHER NEWS UPDATES

RESIDENTS RAISE CONCERNS AT AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING, BUT RENTERS' VOICES ARE MISSING

This past month, on the evening of January 22, a recently-formed subcommittee of state-level elected representatives for the state of Georgia held its first public forum for their constituents to discuss the ongoing affordable housing crisis in Atlanta. The meeting was organized and led by State House representatives Park Cannon and David Dreyer, of house districts 58 and 59, respectively, as well as state Senator Nan Orrock of Senate District 60. The community forum was held at Carver High School in Atlanta's Southside, an area where historic trends of disinvestment and neglect are now coming to a head with surging private development. Residents are raising their concerns about displacement caused by rapidly rising rents and property taxes spurred by the area's potential for development, a pressure that low-income renters are feeling the most.



Hosted by Co-Chairs: Rep. Park Cannon & Rep. David Dreyer

Rep. Dreyer opened the forum, discussing the various issues at hand that led to the subcommittee's formation, including the high number of evictions carried out weekly in Fulton Co., rapidly rising rents that are cost-burdening working class residents of the city, and conversations about these issues with housing activists, including members of the Housing Justice League. Rep. Dreyer touched on several realities of State law that have exacerbated issues of affordable housing over time and that stand as impediments to taking substantial action on these issues. Rep. Cannon made a comment about the perception among Georgia legislators that some of these policies can feel as if they are "etched in stone," a nod to the lingering discriminatory policies that are

characteristic of state law in the Deep South.

Among specific problems mentioned, there exist many preemptive measures statewide that prevent cities and municipalities from raising their minimum wages (Georgia's state minimum wage is still officially \$5.15 an hour), meaning that as rents continue to rise, wages will continue failing to rise alongside them. To further compound this issue of wage stagnation with rising rent costs, there is a statewide prohibition on Rent Control, which means that it is against the law in Georgia to impose restrictions on how landlords may raise rents, leaving it entirely to the discretion of the property-owners. A handout available at the outset of the forum pointed this out to attendees and contained the exact clause prohibiting Rent Control, along with all of Georgia's current Landlord/Tenant laws.

Representatives on the subcommittee invited advocates and organizations to discuss current efforts in Atlanta to address issues of housing affordability and give residents in attendance a look at resources and courses of action they can take. Michelle Lewis, acting as a representative of Invest Atlanta, the city's authority for economic development, discussed Invest Atlanta's home-ownership assistance program that works with renters to offer loan and down-payment assistance as they make the transition from renting to owning a home. Jazz Watts, a representative for the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, discussed their work with families to understand and navigate the legal terrain surrounding inherited property. Tim Franzen spoke on behalf of the Housing Justice League, discussing our work in organizing and supporting tenants' associations as a means for renters to collectively advocate for better living situations and act as an organized political force in the city. Franzen emphasized the political nature of Atlanta's affordability problems, stating that we are "not in a crisis of economic resources...we are in a crisis of economic priority."

As is the case in any conversations around these issues that affect our city's most disenfranchised and marginalized communities first and worst, the most illuminating parts of the evening came from the comments and concerns raised by the residents that attended. Homeowners in attendance frequently brought up the rising property taxes that new investment in the development of Atlanta's communities is causing. These residents shared examples and ideas of combating this issue, ranging from an organization of homeowners in Cabbagetown that formed to address the tax increases, to various suggestions on how to structure and implement forms of tax-abatement.

The use of Community Benefits Agreements (CBA's) was brought up as a tool that may be used to shift our culture of development in the city away from one that allows investors and developers to extract resources from communities without involving their voices or concerns in the process. A Pittsburgh resident raised a question about Georgia State University president Mark Becker reference to



the Georgia State Constitution's gratuities clause (a clause that prevents the State's General Assembly, cities, and counties from giving donations or gifts freely without recompense) in a poor excuse to cite legal reasoning for the university's inability to sign a CBA with the Turner Field communities who were demanding one. The most energetic debate of the night followed this question, as those present either supported or hotly contested the nature of CBAs

and the outcome of the Turner Field communities' efforts. Those in support of GSU's refusal to even negotiate the terms of a CBA, supported the argument against "gratuities," mischaracterizing a CBA as a "handout" or "money-grab," when in reality a CBA is a democratic expression of a community's self-determination.

Clearly missing from the evening's discussion however was the absence of the concerns of renters being voiced directly from renters and tenants themselves. The printed materials available at the tables that met all those as they entered were heavily-oriented towards tenants about current state law concerning their relationships with landlords and how best to protect themselves. Despite this effort, those that dominated conversations were largely not renters and the efforts to discuss these concerns made at the beginning shifted towards the grievances of homeowners. If any progress is to be made in the understanding of the dire situation of Atlanta's renter population, their voices must be heard in these types of spaces.

In the past year, the city's affordable housing crisis has taken center stage politically, largely elevated by the recent mayoral and city council elections. Local representatives are creating spaces that have never existed before, such as the Atlanta Housing Authority's recent multi-panel discussion that was open to the public, and multiple mayoral candidate forums that were entirely dedicated to housing affordability. As platforms for discussion of this issue increase, the reality of the crisis becomes more visible to the city's corporate and political power structure. This is a crucial step to taking serious action, but if the control of the conversation and those getting their opinions heard continues to be consolidated among private developers, the representatives of corporate interests, and political leaders that have been conditioned to court these corporate interests, we are likely to lose sight of the real solutions that Atlanta's residents demand. We must watch these events closely and exercise whatever methods we can to make sure that the voices of those that are most affected, and those whose futures most depend on immediate and substantial action, are the voices that shape the vision of the Atlanta that they want to see.



NOTES FROM HJL'S BOARD RETREAT

From January 19 – 21 the Housing Justice League leadership team went on their annual retreat to plan for the upcoming year. Major decisions that came out of the retreat were to:

1. Start a Renters' Rights Team which will meet on a weekly basis to discuss and organize work related to preventing evictions, holding regular trainings for renters interested in organizing tenant associations, and consider policy goals on improving public housing and laws regulating tenant/landlord relationships.
2. Hire a part-time membership coordinator. This person will have the responsibility of keeping our membership lists up to date and keeping in touch with and collecting dues from members on a monthly basis.
3. Start a stipended resident leadership program for residents in NPU-V to learn how to organize tenant associations beginning in March 2018. The application will be available sometime in March so please stay tuned!

HJL-SPONSORED EVENTS

Thursday February 22 6:30 pm Coalition for Community Benefits Meeting: Coalition meetings are the 4th Thursday of every month at the Martin Street Church of God. Every day, there is work being done by residents, community partners and organizations to ensure that the community benefits from the current and future developments and investments into NPU-V. Come to the meetings to hear what is going on and learn how you can help out! *Food & Childcare provided, [452 Martin St SE, Atlanta, GA 30312](#)

Thursday March 1 Housing Day: Organized by Housing Georgia, a coalition that advocates for public policies to ensure all Georgians have access to safe, decent and affordable housing. All day. RSVP at <https://www.housinggeorgia.org/2017-session/housing-day/>

Wednesday March 7 10:00 am Fulton County Commission Meeting: Join us to let our commissioners know we need property tax relief! Skyrocketing property taxes will displace low and middle income homeowners. [Fulton County Government Center Assembly Hall 141 Pryor St SW](#)

Thursday March 28 3:00 pm Online Tenant Union Training with Homes for All: Are you and your neighbors facing rising rents? Is your landlord threatening you with eviction, deportation or retaliation? Are you and your family forced to live in bad conditions? Now is the time to organize a tenants union to fight back! Join Homes For All's Monthly Tenant Union trainings. Each month we'll dive into the basics and next steps of organizing tenants unions in your building, your neighborhood and across your city!

Each training will have space to take your questions about how to organize with other tenants, and have other renters and organizers on to provide peer feedback and advice!

These trainings are ideal for tenants and/or local organizers who are either just starting to organize or who have been organizing tenants unions and want to get support and training.

go to <https://homesforall.org/tenantuniontrainings/> to register!