



HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

April 2022

MARCH FOR RENT CONTROL AND A TENANT BILL OF RIGHTS

by Natalie

On Saturday April 2, Housing Justice League marched from Woodruff Park to the Georgia State Capitol to demand the state lift its state-wide ban on rent control so that local policymakers can enact necessary policies to protect renters. We also made calls for Atlanta City Council to pass HJL's new Tenant Bill of Rights. We were joined by other organizations including Party for Socialism and Liberation, Democratic Socialists of America, and Women on the Rise, to name a few.

Rent control is currently against the law in Georgia. When historically disinvested neighborhoods start being gentrified this inevitably increases land values and thereby rent. Without rent control, this will continue to happen and will continue to displace entire communities. In 2021, investors bought well over one third of the houses that were for sale in the predominantly Black neighborhoods south and southwest of downtown Atlanta. In some zip codes, the rate of purchase by investors was over 50 percent. We need rent control now and the Tenant Bill of Rights is a step in that direction.

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Housing instability that people face is an inherent feature of capitalism, not some anomaly, and it will not be resolved by the reactionary State which serves this system, no matter who is in office... Private ownership, which allows individuals and corporations to profit off basic necessities like housing, must be challenged and dismantled." - HJL

Tenant Bill of Rights



FOREST COVE'S RELOCATION PROCESS BEGINS AGAIN

by Foluke

After months of delay, the relocation of Forest Cove residents is finally set to resume, this time with the support of the City of Atlanta. For the past year, Millennia—the owner of Forest Cove—has been working to move residents off-site so that it can redevelop the complex. Residents had been waiting years for Millennia to purchase the property so the relocation process could begin. Millennia's acquisition of Forest Cove began in 2017 and was met with several vaguely-explained delays—in the meantime, it failed to provide the maintenance services that residents needed to remain safe and comfortable in their units, causing the property to deteriorate even further. After Millennia finally bought the

property in April 2021, it held a series of relocation meetings with residents, which appeared to signal that there was finally a light at the end of the tunnel.

As is often the case with Millennia, this apparent progress proved too good to be true. The process came to an abrupt halt in January after a City of Atlanta judge ruled for the property to be condemned, prompting the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to deny Millennia's tax credit application—tax credits that Millennia would have used to fund the relocation and renovation of Forest Cove. The condemnation order was the last straw for DCA, which had been putting up with slow responses and incomplete application materials from Millennia for years. Millennia appealed the condemnation order, which put it on hold for the time being, but also meant that residents were stuck on the property until a final

However, some are apprehensive about the locations that they will be moved to. The lack of affordable units in Atlanta means that some tenants may be moved several miles away from the Thomasville Heights neighborhood. In addition, many affordable complexes have conditions that are not much better than those in Forest Cove.

decision was reached.

In March, Millennia and the City of Atlanta came to an agreement that would allow residents to be relocated without having to wait for the outcome of the lawsuit. The agreement states that all residents must be moved off-site by July 15. Millennia has said that it will do its best to move everyone by this deadline, but the speed that it moves will depend on the availability of suitable units. Millennia began a new round of relocation meetings the week of April 11, and if there are no more unforeseen delays, HJL is hopeful that the first residents will move out of Forest Cove sometime in May.

The continuation of the relocation process is wonderful news, as it is imperative that residents escape the complex's life-threatening conditions as soon as possible. However, there are still many unknowns surrounding the future of Forest Cove. The decision to proceed with the relocation was made to get residents off the property quickly, but it is still unclear when they will come back, or where they will come back to. For now, the residents are being given pass-through leases, which means that the lease they have with Millennia will be temporarily transferred to a different landlord. If Millennia is the air.

HUD, Millennia, and the City of Atlanta insist that no residents will end up with nowhere to go if Millennia's deal falls through, but a solid plan has not yet been created.

There was talk among some City of Atlanta officials about rebuilding a complex on the site of the demolished Thomasville Heights housing project, but as of this writing it is unknown whether this is still something that the city is considering. Vigilance is necessary now more than ever, as periods of neighborhood upheaval and uncertainty are ripe for developers to swoop in and see to it that the neighborhood does not change for the benefit of existing residents. This is a particularly relevant concern in this case, as Forest Cove is very close to the Atlanta Beltline.

Most residents appear to be thrilled and relieved that the relocation is picking back up again. After a long wait, many of them are eager to start packing. However, some are apprehensive about the locations that they will be moved to. The lack of affordable units in Atlanta means that some tenants may be moved several miles away from the Thomasville Heights neighborhood. In addition, many affordable complexes have conditions that are not much better than those in

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Forest Cove. Even though the long-awaited relocation is finally happening, it is still important for tenants to stay in communication with one another so that they can take action if the process begins to unfold in a way that disadvantages them.

Housing Justice League is continuing to work with Forest Cove residents and keep them informed as they navigate this critical transition period.

PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY RALLIES AGAINST COP HOUSING

by Monica

On the last Sunday in March, the Community Movement Builders held a rally to stand against an initiative to move cops into the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Southwest Atlanta, in an ostensible bid to “build trust” between the community and cops. However, this effort has been tried before, with dubious results. According to a NextCity piece, the Atlanta Police Foundation and Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation have collaborated to allow officers to access subsidized housing, as well as a monthly \$500 stipend in neighborhoods like Vine City and English Avenue. The Vine

City residents who were neutral or even in favor of the measure, are admitting that there has been no positive change in relations in the community, while cops living near social hangout spots have disrupted traditions due to people parking near “their property.”

As the housing crisis deepens, where the average person cannot afford rising rents, let alone purchasing a home in “up-and-coming” neighborhoods like Pittsburgh, it is a specific insult that those who are paid to police, incarcerate, and otherwise terrorize our communities get a discount on home prices! More and more longtime residents are struggling to maintain their housing, so why would seeing cops getting an easy “in” build more trust? It becomes easier to understand the real impetus behind this when you put these activities in historical context.

Ms. Diane, one of the participants in the community speakout, referenced the history of pre-Holocaust Germany, when Nazi police moved into Jewish areas, lying about providing safety while only preparing to crush communities when ethnic cleansing began. Our modern capitalist police don't have to participate in genocide in that manner; gentrification that



They aim to bulldoze our forests and our neighborhoods, to rebuild Atlanta into a city where the poor and oppressed are forced deeper into the margins, housing and land are cash cows for the rich, and all outcry is quickly stifled by militarized police.



makes existing in bougie new developments illegal for poor people does the trick. We are seeing home prices rise to \$300-400k with no signs of stopping. When the new, whiter, richer residents move in and find the presence of those who built this community a nuisance, the utility of moving these cops in will become more apparent.

The bankrollers of this initiative just so happen to be the same people that have bulldozed the Cop City project through City Council, paying no mind to strong public outcry. They aim to bulldoze our forests and our neighborhoods, to rebuild Atlanta into a city where the poor and oppressed are forced deeper into the margins, housing and land are cash cows for the rich, and all outcry is quickly stifled by militarized police. After a short march to the @Promise Center on Rockwell St, Kamau Franklin pointed out that this “police recreational center” made

possible by “millions of dollars of resources” is empty of Black children, because they know not to trust the police.

I’m reminded of a short conversation I had to have with a cop near the Forest Cove apartments, where he lamented that he couldn’t get kids into the rec center. It’s obvious to the residents of these communities that entering into police strongholds are one way tickets to surveillance and criminalization of them and their peers. With these subsidized housing projects, a concept decried when poor Black people are the beneficiaries, the ruling class aims to bring policing and surveillance right to our front doors.

Large private equity firms, in particular Starwood Capital, have been swallowing up housing, neglecting them, and evicting anyone who can't handle the soaring rents. This process of displacement reflects the long history of racist housing practices dating back to redlining with black residents facing the brunt of evictions in the city.

EVICTION DEFENSE WORKING GROUP UPDATE

by Thomas

The Eviction Defense Working Group is taking a change of direction following a retreat over the last weekend in March. The members sat down over those two days to evaluate the landscape of housing in Atlanta, review the strengths and weaknesses of previous work, and develop a new six-month plan going forward. Among the largest changes are the narrowing of the focus of the group to just one or two campaigns at a time and a restructuring of the Tenant Power Hotline.

On the housing landscape, the research team has uncovered several important processes going on not just here in Atlanta but in every city in America. Large private equity firms, in particular Starwood Capital, have been swallowing up housing, neglecting them, and evicting anyone who can't handle the soaring rents. This process of displacement reflects the long history of racist housing practices dating back to redlining with black residents facing the brunt of evictions in the city.

Understanding this process is critical for the strategy going forward.

Our largest campaign of the last few months was Ms. Juliet's campaign. A tenant in the same Decatur residence for 27 years, her landlord Dustin Maxwell served her an eviction notice with plans to sell the house. A massive campaign to stop this eviction ensued, and a petition against the eviction gathered 3,000 signatures the week before her hearing. After much negotiation with Dustin an agreement was reached. But now he is going back on his word and refusing to sell Ms. Juliet's home to her. We are continuing to put pressure on Dustin in order to get him to do the right thing. Of course Ms. Juliet's story is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Gentrification continues to sweep through Black Atlanta neighborhoods, and Starwood Capital owns 90 properties within just a 1 mile radius of Ms. Juliet's home. The EDWG has their sights set now on organizing larger groups of tenants, such as in the Royal Oaks Apartment Complex, and plan to one day take on Starwood Capital directly.

The Tenant Power Hotline will continue to take calls but will refocus its priorities on directing callers to the pre-existing structures in HJL (the mass meetings and tenant organizer trainings) for organizing support instead of trying to provide in-depth one-



EVICTION
DEFENSE
WORKING
GROUP MEETS
EVERY TUESDAY
AT 5PM AND
EVERY
THURSDAY AT
2PM ON ZOOM.

EMAIL
EVICTIONDEFENSE
@HOUSINGJUSTICELEA
GUE.ORG

on-one organizing support to every caller. The hotline will also continue to provide legal information and referrals for financial assistance. Beyond the hotline, tenant organizing trainings will continue to be held so that tenants can begin organizing their neighborhoods and apartment complexes in greater numbers. Through solidarity and direct action, tenants will be able to take the fight directly to landlords, increasing their ability to fight back. If you want to help build tenant power, the Eviction Defense Working Group meets every Tuesday at 5PM and every Thursday at 2PM. Only together can the process of gentrification and predatory evictions be fought and only together can we build a better world.

BELTLINE FOR ALL AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY WORKING GROUP UPDATE

by John

The BeltLine for All working group is charging ahead for 2022! In March, we had a planning meeting to outline the activities that we aim to complete over the next six months, based on three themes: connecting with city- and state-level officials, attracting new members to our working group, and streamlining internal communication and affordable housing education within our working group. In early April, we rolled up our sleeves and began to work. Our primary focus for April is the planning and execution of a public-facing panel in May, inviting candidates for Georgia State Congress and Fulton County Commission seats to educate the public on their views and goals pertaining to affordable housing. We're in the thick of planning this public panel now, so if you'd like to help us, please let us know!

Relating back to our three themes for the next six months, we have other activities in store. To further connect with public officials, we plan to attend City Council



APRIL 2022

UPCOMING

Thursday April 21

@4:00PM - 3529 Misty Valley Rd

Press Conference at Ms. Juliet's House

After thinking we had just about sealed the deal, Ms. Juliet is now at risk of eviction again due to her landlord deciding he wants to profit even more from her house. Come show your support for Ms. Juliet as she enters a new phase of the struggle to save her home!



meetings and prepare a 1 page document about our work to share with officials whom we meet, to spark conversation with those officials. We've recently connected with an official within the City of Atlanta's Department of City Planning, who is eager to help us promote our Affordable Housing Policy Package to public officials. We look forward to collaborating with him to advance the Policy Package and our other initiatives as they come to fruition.

To make our working group more accessible to those interested in joining us, we will soon update our New Member Orientation Manual. And, we will keep ourselves up-to-date on the affordable housing landscape by sending regularly scheduled updates on relevant news and events. We've got a lot to work on and are excited by the challenge. If you're not part of our working group, we welcome your enthusiastic participation. Here's to a productive and impactful 2022 for BeltLine for All!



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