

Housing Justice League Newsletter February 2019

Peoplestown Residents Demand a Beltline for All

by Livvy Feeney



Peoplestown resident Ms. Kali Sichen speaks at a BeltLine meeting.

On January 24th at 7pm at the Rick McDevitt Youth Center, residents of Peoplestown and Pittsburgh showed up in force to the Beltline Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting. The meeting was an update from BeltLine employees on their Master Plan for the development in Subarea 2, which will run south of the Peoplestown and Pittsburgh neighborhoods. BeltLine representatives presented their plan with recommendations for land use, mobility, and parks, and then took questions and feedback from the public. Looking at maps of a future development which could drastically change their communities, multiple residents made powerful

comments asserting that they will not stand for the gentrification of their communities.

In reference to a mural on the sidewalk on Ralph David Abernathy which records the history of the area, Ms. Kali Sichen asserted, "What you think of those people that have be" Peoplestown has been redlined ever since 1950. The poverty and low-income that you see here is because of those policies, it's not because of us being inferior people... This is historical record here in Peoplestown." This connection between the hisen displaced, is to walk on them. We don't like that." She points to the great irony of the City touting public art to preserve Black history, yet acting in ways that displaces and disinvests in black communities.

People are literally walking on the history which the BeltLine metaphorically walks on through its construction by displacing and gentrifying historic black neighborhoods. When you walk down the Beltline's Westside and Eastside Trails, you pass by various signs recording Civil Rights history which are part of the public art project "Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement, 1944-1968," curated by historian and author Karcheik Sims-Alvarado. In fact, the exhibit is the longest outdoor exhibition on civil and human rights in the United States. Yet, as Ms. Kali Sichen points to, one can read the displays as



extremely performative. While it may seem that the City and the Beltline is making an effort to preserve and support the city's Civil Rights Movement history, in practice, the BeltLine itself has been a tool of destruction in historically black working class neighborhoods.

Another resident who made powerful comments was Dr. Thomas Simmons. He said, toric disinvestment in black communities and racist housing policy to current day development and housing policy is crucial. As he asserts, this pattern of systematic racism is not new, but continues to arise in different forms. The recent history of redlining and the way its impact continues to be felt today are necessary in setting the historical and economic context of current day development in Atlanta.

You can find videos of the rest of Ms. Sichen and Dr. Simmon's comments on Housing Justice League's Facebook page. Look out for more HJL film clips soon! Thank you to the filmmakers who

are volunteering their time to making these projects happen.

Reflection on *The Home Team*

by Gabe Eisen

A contingent from Housing Justice League went to see the debut of Camille Pendley's film *The Home Team* on January 31st. Strategically released just before Super Bowl weekend, the documentary shows how the construction of Mercedes Benz Stadium has affected surrounding neighborhoods of Vine City and English Avenue. The film follows a variety of neighborhood residents, policy advocates, and church leaders to highlight the ludicrous inequity in building a publicly-subsided, multi-million dollar stadium directly adjacent to neighborhoods severely neglected for decades. While, as part of stadium construction, the Blank foundation has pledged a handsome sum to the neighborhoods in the form

Exciting Announcement!

As of February 10th, residents at Columbia Senior Residences of Mechanicsville Apartments officially started a tenant association! We are very excited to work with them as new members of Housing Justice League. Each additional tenant association we partner with is building out a network of tenant power and moving towards a future city-wide tenant union!



Members of Columbia Senior Residences of Mechanicsville Tenant Association.
Photo Credit Deborah Arnold



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of the Westside Future Fund, the money seems to be tied up in ambiguous, bureaucratic limbo, and residents see little real programming. Moreover, many residents feel the Fund is imposing and patronizing—a bunch of corporate suits sent in from the outside to tell people what is good for them.

According to the Westside Future Fund website, the City of Atlanta has funneled nearly \$115 million into the project and the Blank Foundation has given \$30 million. Yet these numbers pale in comparison to the total cost of the Mercedes Benz Stadium, estimated at \$1.6 billion and growing as more expenses arise, including 700 million in taxpayer dollars. In addition to revealing the stadium for the injustice that it is, the film also highlights efforts of resistance: residents are organizing their own community groups, and also showing up to the Future Fund meetings religiously. Additionally,

the film features civil rights lawyer Wayne Kendall, who is currently suing the Falcons in attempt to get them to pay taxes on the stadium, which they currently do not have to do. We will be screening the film as the third installment in our Housing Justice Film Series! Join us at 7pm on Wednesday May, 15th at MOTHER to for a film screening and discussion. Check out the trailer online at thehometeamfilm.com.

For more coverage of the injustices surrounding the Super Bowl and stadium construction, we recommend reading: “Let Them Eat Pigskin” by Tom Joyce and “Lighting, Struck” by Max Blau.

REPORT BACK FROM HPTA’S FIRST TENANT DEFENSE ACTION

Two weeks ago Home Park Tenants Association had our first ever victory as an organization, and we have agreed to pause our wild and continuous celebration for a brief moment to discuss what we’ve learned. First some background: we had just created our Tenants’ Defense Committee days prior, when a resident of the neighborhood approached us in distress over a conflict with her landlord. He had a history of unfair demands and obnoxious behavior, and was now demanding that she pay \$140 because her boyfriend was there too much, despite the lack of basis for anything like this in the lease. What follows is a brief summary of how we were able to defend her rights as a tenant, and some notes on lessons that we intend to take into to our future organizing:



The first teachable moment for us came when this tenant reached out to us less than 24 hours after we posted a graphic to our facebook page advertising our eagerness to help any tenant whose landlord may be breaking the law. This graphic was crudely drawn up in MS Paint, and not posted widely, so that fact that it returned exactly what we were looking for almost immediately is a testament to the power of this tactic. As such, we are now creating more fliers and graphics to post on the internet and around the neighborhood to raise awareness of our organizing efforts. Previously, all our messaging had focused on upcoming events, and put the potential benefits of a tenants association in vague, general terms. We believe that the specificity of this message was key to its success, so the promotional fliers we are working on now each center around a common problem that we are equipped to help with.

The second came when we saw the lease, which contains numerous illegal clauses and

I think my landlord is breaking the law but I don't know what to do about it!

Join the Home Park Tenants Association



typos. Seriously, this thing may as well be written in crayon. It was so bad we decided it was worthwhile to look up what other properties he rented out, and canvass to see if those people were having any similar issues. He only has one other property, and the tenant we spoke to confirmed that his lease also contained some irregularities but there was no conflict at the moment, though he was happy to have our contact info for future reference. By now, it was already clear that this landlord had probably never had to deal with any resistance from his tenants of any sort. This level of ignorance of the law combined with a habit of line-stepping is a pattern among landlords in Home Park and we intend to continue to take full advantage of it until they wise up.

Our next step in the process was to visit the tenant in her home and get a detailed report. We found that the landlord was committing infractions at a near constant rate – everything from visiting unannounced to adding a new fee to the lease after it was signed. In one especially bizarre incident, the tenant came out of her room to see a strange man wearing only her towel, and discovered that it was her landlord's work associate who had defecated in his pants and been sent to her house to clean himself up. We really had a lot of material to work with here. Since the rent was due soon the issue was time sensitive, so we drafted an e-mail from the Tenants' Association in which we listed his illegal behaviors including the recent fee and demanded that he stop them. In the future we intend to do this sort of thing by certified mail whenever possible so that we can make offending landlords sign to acknowledge receipt of our demands, but technically an e-mail is just as valid for legal matters.



The next morning, the tenants woke up to a frantic voicemail from the landlord telling her she was evicted. At this point, we consulted with our friends at HJL who confirmed our suspicion that this guy had just messed up. We decided to give him a few more hours to worry about it, and advised the tenant to send him a text message saying that self-help evictions are illegal, and that she would be paying her rent but not the \$140 fee, and if he wanted to talk about it, he could call her that evening. When he did, an HPTA organizer was there to answer the phone. He was cornered and immediately complied with every demand.

This may have been a small victory, but we have demonstrated our potential for collective power to our neighbors and to ourselves. We intend this to be the first step towards a neighborhood where nobody has to deal with their landlord alone.

In solidarity,
 Home Park Tenants Association

HJL Member Greg Ames Takes Direct Action With Freedom University

by Tim Franzen

On Tuesday, February 12, nine community leaders - including four clergy members - disrupted a Georgia Board of Regents' public meeting in support of undocumented students banned from public universities in Georgia.

Following the opening invocation at the Board of Regents meeting, nine individuals stood up to



Greg Ames and other activists peacefully protest for undocumented students rights.

continue the prayer in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience. Participants included clergy members Rev. Matthew Laney, Rev. Federico Apecena, Rev. Jonathan Rogers, and Rev. Dave Dunn. Community members included Freedom University faculty members Dr. Cindy Lutenbacher, Dr. Laura Emiko Soltis, and Professor Charmaine Minniefield, and Greg Ames of the Housing Justice League. Also arrested was comedian and political satirist Jordan Klepper, who was covering the event.

Ten undocumented student leaders were also present at the meeting, identifying themselves by wearing handmade monarch butterfly wings to symbolize their identity as migrants. Faith leaders prayed that the Board of Regents would "Love thy neighbor" and "Welcome the stranger" by respecting the human rights and dignity of undocumented youth. They urged them to repeal the state's policies banning undocumented students from equal access to public higher education. Reverend Matt Laney, Senior Pastor at



Undocumented students wear monarch butterfly wings to symbolize their immigrant identities.

Virginia-Highland Church, began the disruption in prayer, stating, "God of all people, the State of Georgia has overcome segregation in education before, and we call upon your presence and power to move the conscience of our state to end segregation in education again today," Georgia Capitol police arrested all nine individuals, and transported them to Fulton County Jail.

The direct action was coordinated by Freedom University, an award-winning human rights organization and freedom school for undocumented students in Atlanta. Freedom University provides undocumented students tuition-free college level classes, college application and scholarship assistance, and social movement leadership training in the Kingian tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience.

Greg Ames, a longtime HJL member who was arrested with the group on Tuesday, said "The last two times I worked with Freedom University I was shocked at how bright and sharp all these students are. These young people deserve a right

to be educated! I also hate seeing these young people pushed around by the Georgia Board of Regents."

We at HJL are so proud of Greg and all the other community members that put their bodies and freedom on the line to fight against segregation in Georgia's public education system! Find out more about Freedom Universities important work at Freedom-university.org.

The Fight Against the Gulch Tax Giveaway Is Gaining Traction

by Tanya Washington and Julien Bene

A growing number of Atlanta residents oppose the Mayor's scheme to let billionaire developers CIM/Spring Street siphon off up to \$1.9 Billion in property and sales taxes for the development of high-end retail and luxury housing in the heart of the City of Atlanta. Most Atlantans will not be able to shop or live in the Gulch, but \$312 million of this giveaway would come from school property taxes. All \$1.9 Billion in taxes could be funding schools, teachers, firefighters, infrastructure, and providing affordable housing instead of funding this elite development. Instead the City has made a deal that serves billionaires, with a reputation in both NY and CA for being exploitative slumlords, rather than its residents.

Public opposition should not be surprising and it continues to be effective.

The Redlight the Gulch Coalition (RLTG) was formed in resistance to this colossal rip-off whose



Community members demand the City Redlight the Gulch at the United We Shall Stand Rally on February 2nd

effects will be felt for the next 20 years and people from across the City, from Bankhead to Buckhead emailed and called City Council members and spoke out at long Council meetings last fall in opposition to the massive giveaway. Despite Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms' initial position that the terms of the deal could not be re-negotiated, the public pressure motivated her to rewrite it and to reduce the initially-proposed developer tax breaks by nearly \$780 million. Despite these successes the City, after spending a great deal of political capital, the Mayor convinced eight City Council members to vote for the worst development deal the City has ever entered into.

After the legislation passed, RLTC took its fight into court, raising money to mount a legal challenge to the development deal. You can

become part of this fight by donating today! RLTC members intervened in the bond validation proceedings and challenging the vague, overreaching and unconstitutional scheme. The hearings in Fulton Superior Court are continuing, with the next one on February 21st. While the City/Developer legal team outnumbers us by 20 to 1, the deal appears to be on shaky legal ground. Our lawyer has lodged some 30 legal objections and the judge just ordered that discovery be allowed in the case, which will afford intervenors access to the details of the deal. The devil is always in the details!

Just as Amazon decided to leave NY because of protests by NY residents about the one-sided nature of the deal with Amazon, let's make CIM and the City decide to withdraw the Gulch deal by legally challenging this scheme which enriches billionaires at the expense of the people. Atlanta's residents deserve a better deal than the Gulch!

Redlight the Gulch has had to raise money to cover the expenses of this legal challenge. So far, some 140 residents have generously contributed to RTGC's Gofundme to cover legal costs. We need your help to keep up the fight! Please make a donation so that RLTC can continue its efforts to challenge this awful deal.

Contribute to HJL's newsletter!

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, photos/drawings/comics/etc.

Go to housingjusticeleague.com >> "News" >> "Contribute to the Newsletter" and fill out the short form.



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SEEKING VENUE LOCATIONS!

We are seeking new spaces throughout Atlanta to hold mass meetings, tenant trainings, and other events. Spaces would preferably be wheelchair 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 housingjusticeleague@gmail.com

STOP
GENTRIFICATION
ON THE
BELTLINE

DEMAND
AFFORDABLE
HOUSING
& DEVELOPMENT
W/OUT DISPLACEMENT

SIGN THE
PETITION

[HTTP://BIT.DO/BELTLINE4ALL](http://bit.do/beltline4all)



#BELTLINE4ALL

Open your the camera app on your phone and scan this QR code to go to the Beltline for All petition online and sign it! Once you're done reading the newsletter, cut out this poster and hang it up in your building, community center, favorite coffee shop, etc to help us spread the word. Go to housingjusticeleague.org to find other ways to get involved!



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Housing Justice League
presents the

Housing Justice Film Series

Join us to learn how gentrification has transformed cities and hear stories of communities fighting for housing as a human right!

March 13 at 7pm



City Rising

City Rising illuminates the journey of California's neighborhoods advocating for responsible development. The documentary examines gentrification in the state — its historical roots, economic role and social consequences.

April 17 at 7pm



Priced Out

Priced Out is an investigative and personal look at housing discrimination and the pain of losing a community to gentrification in Portland, Oregon. The film explores the complexities and contradictions of gentrification and life after the era of "the ghetto."

May 15 at 7pm



The Home Team

The construction of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium has brought a lot of hype and money to the Atlanta, but what about the neighbors next door? The new documentary, **The Home Team**, explores how Atlanta's Westside communities have been overshadowed due to the stadium development.

MOTHER Bar + Kitchen
447 Edgewood Ave SE,
Atlanta

Donations accepted and no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Yummy drinks and food available for order at MOTHER. Stick around after each film for a discussion!



UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Friday, February 22, 4:30-8:30pm - *Lake Claire Beltline For All Potluck and Dialogue AND Art Party* - 278

Connecticut Ave NE. Come spray paint "House Not For Sale" signs at 4:30 and stick around for a potluck at 6:30 to discuss the BeltLine development. Come learn more, ask questions, and brainstorm how we can push for a #BeltLine4All! Hosted by Gabe Eisen.

Thursday, February 28, 6:30-8:30pm - *Tenant Organizing Training* - 678 **Joseph E Boone Blvd NW, Atlanta, GA 30314.** How to start a tenant association, protect tenant rights to quality, affordable housing, and build power to stop displacement! Please email housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com for location and to RSVP!

Saturday, March 9, 12-2pm - *Beltline for All Canvassing Day* - location tbd. Knock on doors in Grant Park and Orwood neighborhoods with us to spread the word about the #Beltline4All campaign, collect

predatory "We Buy Houses" signs, and offer "House Not For Sale" signs to residents.

Wednesday, March 13, 7pm - *Housing Justice Film Series Part 1: City Rising* - 447 **Edgewood Ave SE.** Join us at MOTHER for a screening of City Rising and stick around after for a discussion! City Rising illuminates the journey of California's neighborhoods advocating for responsible development and against gentrification.

Tuesday, March 19, 6:30pm - *HJL Mass Meeting* - 1040 **Crew St SW 30315.** We will discuss the current status of all campaigns, the organization, and have breakouts for tenant associations, BeltLine for All, and more! It will be a potluck, so please bring a dish if you are able.

* For all events, please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com if you need childcare.



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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