



Housing Justice League Newsletter March 2020

City-wide Moratorium on Eviction Announced! We will Support one another through the public health crisis and organize to be stronger from it.

By Natalie McLaughlin and Richard Hunsinger

The Coronavirus is starting to have a strong impact on the economy and peoples' day to day lives. In the coming weeks, the US healthcare system, housing system, labor market, all the private and social institutions which structure our economy, are going to come under tremendous strain as a result of this crisis. The extent to which we lack any infrastructure for social care in our country is now being rapidly revealed to everyone. This is the consequence of an economy solely organized for the relentless pursuit of profit, to be met at all costs. This crisis demands we take the utmost precautions, and that includes continuing the struggle for housing.

Even though we need to distance ourselves physically, it's critical for us to come together at this time to support one another however we can. A lot of people in Atlanta are working hard to organize support/mutual aid networks to help each other out. Here are some resources to use and share with others who might need them:

- [Atlanta COVID19 Mutual Aid FB group](#)
- [Food4Life](#) - Free Grocery Deliveries For All / a #COVID19 relief initiative. Read more and get involved here.
- If you have been laid off and you need to **file for unemployment insurance**, you can do so online through the [Georgia Department of Labor](#). For help with unemployment insurance claims, email CherrellBrown13@gmail.com

- [Atlanta Need/Assistance Survey](#) google form for folks who need money, resources, or other kinds of support. To contact the folks who run it directly: atlresponse@gmail.com or (551) 697-1568
- [A helpful resource guide for low income and immigrant people in Metro-Atlanta](#)

Housing Justice League has been working to organize around the health crisis and its intersections with housing justice issues. On Monday March 16, HJL sent letters to Fulton and DeKalb Magistrate Courts and Sheriff's Offices asking for clarification and further action on preventing eviction and the further escalation of the coronavirus pandemic. **Shortly after these letters were sent, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced a city-wide moratorium on eviction for the next 60 days.** We are so relieved the Mayor took this step, and glad that she did the right thing. We are still very concerned, however, about what will happen when many tenants fall behind on their rent and the moratorium is lifted.

On **Wednesday at 5:30 PM**, HJL members will have a Zoom call to discuss what further action can be taken at this time such as a campaign to **push Governor Kemp to enact a statewide rent freeze and eviction moratorium**. The only way we can continue to secure these basic needs in this time of crisis is if we come together to make it happen. If you want to join the call, email evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org.

You can learn about eviction and foreclosure moratoriums in cities and states across the country [here](#).



HJL working with Tenant Associations/Tenant Partnerships

The Tenant Association Partnerships with Housing Justice League continue to grow. Our partnership with various associations brings much added value and power to the organization. HJL is only as strong as its membership. Residents and resident leaders are really exemplifying power and how tenant leadership transforms communities.

Stanton Oaks & HJL Member, Sherise Brown:

Sherise noticed that during their resident meetings many of the residents were complaining about their experiences receiving notifications, evictions, high turnover of management staff, and maintenance issues. Sherise knew these were tactics that she had witnessed before with different complexes during her work as a VISTA and community organizer, and she knew that the issues needed to be addressed with management. The tenant association tried on many occasions to resolve these issues with local property management but were not able to come to a fair resolution on these important issues. The TA had several planning meetings as to how they would activate their tenant power and address these issues without management harassment. The resident leadership reached out to the owners of property to begin a constructive conversation on how to address the issues for tenants. The tenants demanded that they meet with owners face to face. The owners agreed to fly to Atlanta and have the meeting. During the meeting many of the issues were addressed with resolutions. Stanton Oaks Tenants Association continues to fight for tenants' rights!

City Views at Rosa Burney, led by board member Deborah Arnold: Residents have been in an ongoing fight with the new potential owners who have created great barriers to tenants who wish to return after the renovation. Concerns have included the right of tenants to return after the renovations, management competency, and disrespect by management. Deborah and the residents stood up and fought back against the

new owners to not incorporate a harsh 99-year criminal background check in the plan, acknowledge and support the ongoing tenant organization efforts, and to get rid of horrible property management. After many negotiations, City Views at Rosa Burney Tenants Association was able to negotiate a more humane and dignified process of criminal background checks, the elimination of current residents having to pay a new deposit upon return, a designated meeting space for tenants only, and new management! All these negotiations are an addendum to the sales closing and has been signed off by both parties!
WHEN WE FIGHT, WE WIN!

Columbia Senior at Mechanicville, led by HJL Tenant Organizing Fellow, Teresa Dunn: CSM meets regularly to conduct normal business, plan tenant functions and enjoy fellowship with one another. That was until a property manager's words deterred them from meeting in a particular part of the residents' common area. Residents were told that they could not meet in the area, and if they did they would be in violation of their lease. This spooked many residents and some had stopped attending meetings. Teresa sprung into action and organized her building by hosting a know your rights tenant training and asking for a meeting with upper level management. After many meetings, Columbia management has agreed to allow tenants to use the space without managerial interference, respect the current resident association, and lend resources that will help engage residents!



Briarcliff Summit Tenants Association, led by HJL Tenant Organizing Fellows, Diane Holloway, Rhonda Robinson: Briarcliff Summit is reenergizing their tenants association. They have been able to bring more residents together to organize around building maintenance issues and recertification issues. Leaders and residents have taken great pride in having a tenant association to help fight any injustices that could arise. They not only meet about business, they are also very creative and innovate in which ways they are engaging residents. Just recently they held a fundraiser by way of having a resident dance (Doo wop) to raise funding for their association. As Rhonda Robinson says, “I am so glad that I went through the fellowship program with HJL, it has really inspired me to learn how to organize.” Diane Holloway, who is also a part of the Eviction Defense team said, “we are doing great things at Briarcliff and I am happy to be one of the ones involved.”



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 our organization to use. Have any leads?

Email us at housingjusticeleague@gmail.com



The Peoplestown Block Fight Against Eminent Domain takes Housing Justice League to South Carolina to Address US Presidential Candidate Joe Biden
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Flooding in Peoplestown, resulting from overdevelopment and decades of neglect, prompted former Mayor Kasim Reed to create a plan to build a park, waterfall, pond, and educational gazebo to mitigate the flooding. Mayor Reed exempted then 93-year-old Ms. Mattie Jackson from the takings and demolished more than 20 homes on a block in the heart of a historic black neighborhood in Atlanta. Four families who were suspicious of the city's motives refused to settle and were sued in 2016. Their names were removed from the deeds to their property and they continue to pay their mortgages, even though they face the daily risk of eviction.

In the course of the 3 years of litigation, emails surfaced which were authored by the City of Atlanta engineer, who was the project manager for the proposed park and pond, which clearly documented that there was no engineering data to support the taking of the entire block of homes and that the proposed plan was not necessary to mitigate the flooding. Of the 27 homes that were on the block, only 5 remain, including the home of Ms. Mattie Jackson, who turned 98 on 2/20/20. The city's attorneys have stated repeatedly in court and at City Hall that as soon as she dies they will take her home.

The current Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, voted to pass the ordinance authorizing the use of eminent domain when she was an Atlanta city council member. She has been made aware of the error made by the City of Atlanta in taking the homes in Peoplestown. The remaining residents on the Peoplestown block have repeatedly asked her to do the right thing and withdraw the lawsuits. She has refused to do so.

On the debate stage, the U.S. Presidential Candidate Joe Biden has highlighted the issue of gentrification and how it is displacing black families who can't afford to live in the cities they've called home for decades. His passion on this point raises the question, 'why would he engage Atlanta Mayor Bottoms as a key surrogate when she is using eminent domain to accelerate gentrification and to displace black families in her own city?' Mayor Bottoms has not done enough to address Atlanta's reputation as the 4th fastest gentrifying city, it's ranking as the most unequal city in America for the 2nd year in a row, and as a place from which black people are being rapidly displaced on her watch.

On February 28 Mrs Darden, Mrs. Washington and an army of Housing Justice League activists/members traveled to South Carolina to deliver a clear message to Presidential Candidate Joe Biden about their key Southern surrogate, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms. Their efforts were not in vain. In Sumter, South Carolina, Mrs. Washington and former GA Senator Vincent Fort address Biden at a small rally and asked him, "to tell Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms to stop displacing black people in Atlanta." Six hours later in Spartanburg, SC, Mrs. Darden was able to ask Joe Biden the same question. After the exchange, Joe Biden assured Mrs. Darden that he would follow up with her about the eminent domain lawsuit against her and her husband. She has yet to hear from him, but she remains optimistic. This is the latest chapter in a 7-year fight to save the homes of legacy residents in Peoplestown, which Housing Justice League has supported and helped lead. This trip demonstrates our commitment to support these families and this community against the unlawful and unjust use of eminent domain to evict Peoplestown residents from their home to make way for a fancy park and pond. We will continue to stand with them to ensure that justice is done!

WHEN WE FIGHT WE WIN!!



BeltLine for All Working Group Update

We believe in collective action that joins policymakers, organizations and everyday residents in alliance with those most threatened by displacement to ensure that Atlanta is a city for all. Residents need development and economic mobility opportunities and not displacement. We also need our history and culture to be respected. In this working group we work to shift the balance of power to the residents so that they are able to contribute to the development of their own communities. We acknowledge the long history of racism and displacement our communities have endured in order to enact public policies that work for residents.

Last year the BeltLine for all working group and other partners worked really hard to collect 5,000 signatures for a petition, host "dinner and dialogues" for political education, and create a BeltLine anti-displacement policy package. The petition is really close to its goal of 5,000 signatures. We currently have the signatures of 4,200 people who believe residents should not be priced out or displaced and that the Beltline has reneged on its promise to create thousands of affordable housing units. The "dinner and dialogues" proved to be a much needed resource for residents that did not understand the direct impact of the Beltline. All of this hard work has called for even more action.

As we are embarking upon our 6-month work plan, we are working hard to bring more public awareness to the harmful disruption of the beltline in low to moderate-income communities. Everyday residents are working to shift the power imbalances. We are fighting for our communities to have participatory planning, a right to remain, rights of first refusal, and other policies that will protect residents against displacement. Some of our work will include direct actions (civil disobedience), legislative activism, and political education. If you are interested in joining this working group please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com.

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, and photos/drawings/comics/etc.

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



Eviction Defense Working Group Update

Although the Eviction Defense working group is still in its early stages, we are making great progress in fighting Atlanta's eviction crisis. With our eviction defense manuals printed, infoline set up, and monthly canvassing scheduled, we've developed a great deal of internal organization that will help us in the future. The eviction defense manual is serving as a great tool to grow our outreach campaign. Many libraries and community centers in high eviction areas now carry free copies, and we always have copies to hand out during canvassing or when returning calls from our infoline. We hope to further use the manual in our community information sessions on eviction defense that will also act as an introduction to tenant organizing for renters. With so much work behind us, we are now focusing on developing a six-month plan for the future of our working group.

One of the biggest items that we want to work on in the near future is developing our internal skill set. That is why we have committed to facilitating three organizer trainings within the next six months, with our first one tentatively set for the beginning of April. Additionally, we plan on scheduling conversations with the DC DSA as well as labor organizers from Atlanta to help teach us strategies for organizing tenants. These skills will help form the foundation of our future organizing efforts. Our group has a long way to go and a lot to learn, but we are well on our way to building the movement that will end the eviction crisis once and for all. Email us at evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org if you want to get involved!



UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Thursday March 19 6:30 pm - Beltline 4 All 6-month work planning meeting 6:30 pm at the - **Rick McDevitt Youth Center - 1040 Crew St SW**

Wednesday March 25 7:00 pm - *Eviction Defense Working Group Meeting* - **Zoom call** - Email evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org if you plan to attend!

Tuesday April 21, 6:30 pm - *HJL Mass Meeting* - **Rick McDevitt Youth Center - 1040 Crew St SW**

Save the date! Saturday June 6 11:00 am - 2:00 pm - *HJL Membership Meeting* - On June 6, 2020 from 11:00 - 2:00 p.m. HJL will host its first members' meeting. At this meeting we will take a deeper dive into our organization goals, understand the work from each working group, onboard new members, and build camaraderie!

* 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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