



Housing Justice League Newsletter

May 2019

Membership and Bylaws Update

Housing Justice League is seeking feedback on our organizational bylaws draft from our members. We are sending the draft to all individual members of the organization and posting it on our website at housingjusticeleague.org on June 4. For our June 18 mass meeting we will dedicate most of the agenda to a bylaws overview and feedback session. We are also holding meetings with every tenant association associated with HJL to give an overview of the bylaws and get their input. After collecting and incorporating feedback, we will hold a vote this summer to ratify the bylaws.

Keep reading for an overview of some of the key points of the new bylaws! We hope to explain what their purpose is, as well as their importance in making Housing Justice League a more democratic organization for its membership.

Why are these Bylaws so important right now? Well, the work and the base of support for Housing Justice League has expanded rapidly in the past year. Up to this point, we must admit that this has been both exciting for the organization and a challenge to manage. Much of this is because we have lacked an organized



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protocol by which our membership base can be involved in the work and take ownership of it. With these Bylaws, we seek to make more clear the functions of Housing Justice League at present, as well as the ways in which we can more adequately support independent self-organizing from tenants and other members.

Our proposed Bylaws include in the early sections one on the Purpose & Objectives of the organization (Articles, Section 3). These are meant to start to lay down some points of unity by which we can begin to base the commonality of our struggle, and for us to have a set of principles by which we may be able to guide our own



organizing efforts and their goals. It is important for us to begin developing an analysis of our situation, and one that can allow us to see the same struggles happening for every tenant in our city, so that we may also be able to teach them as well how to organize and thus strengthen our collective political power.

Part 2 of the proposed draft of the Bylaws it General Membership. Here we lay out responsibilities of members as well as our dues-paying system, and rules around what constitutes a “member in good standing”. We also take time to enumerate what it means for tenant associations to be members of Housing Justice League, as well as our commitment to work in partnership with these tenant associations while also affirming their own autonomy as organizations.

We also have taken great care to lay out an inclusive and clear process for voting in Part 4, and ways in which members can propose matters to be put to a vote to the broader membership of the organization for any such matters that would require it. This aims to make Housing Justice League an organization whose members can truly guide the work together, and through this become an organized body that is drawn closer into communication with each other as members take up more ownership of the work.

Part 6 of our proposed Bylaws illuminates the Board’s functions and positions. Transparency in Board functions is key to making Housing Justice League an organization that is accountable to, and ultimately governed by, its membership and

tenant association base. Also, as we make the move to elect 2 new Board members this fall, it is important for members to have access to the knowledge of the Board’s roles and responsibilities to the organization at large, and be active in making sure that this is an organization that is democratic and reflects the work and views of its base.

One such proposal for this is an Organizing Group model, as laid out in Part 7 of our proposed draft of the Bylaws. This model would allow for any group of members of Housing Justice League to form a group for the purpose of organizing around a particular issue related to housing justice or maintaining another necessary function of the organization. An example of this would be an organizing group that is formed for the purpose of keeping our membership list up-to-date and organized. Another would be a group of members formed to coordinate our outreach and support for tenant organizing. Another could be for specific research on slumlords in Atlanta. The possibilities are sure to be endless, and will expand as the organization grows, producing groups of members organizing independently and in cooperation with each other to advance the movement for housing justice in Atlanta.

Why is this communication and ownership of the work so important? It is because in order to build the political power necessary to make Housing Justice League and all the tenants and tenant associations we work with a political force for the tenants’ rights to safe, decent, affordable housing, we must become an organized city-wide



unit that can share knowledge and take action together in a unified manner. This process will certainly not happen over-night, but it is important that we begin building our consciousness and strategies to begin encompassing the problems that face all of us, and affect Atlanta as a whole. Our building and our tenant association is not the only one experiencing problems with management, or at risk of becoming as unaffordable as the rest of the city. This is a struggle that faces all tenants in the city, and we are all on the front lines of this struggle together. Only through a union in our organization and action will we build the power necessary to make us a force formidable enough to combat it.

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.

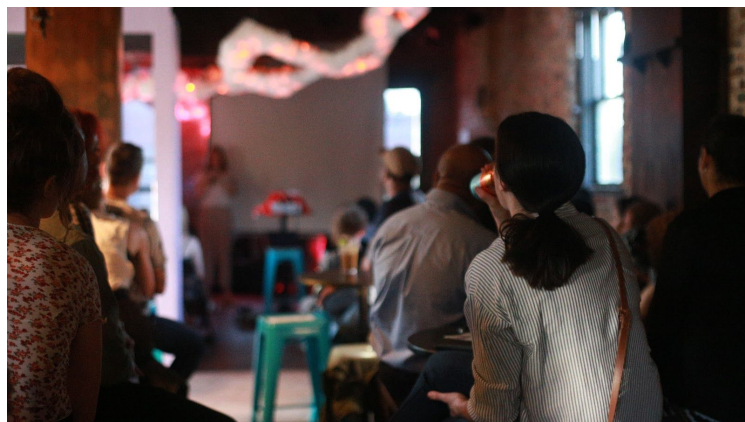
Some examples of this include commentary on policing, incarceration, housing instability, environmental justice, privatization of education and large-scale development, and the selling out of communities.

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, and photos/drawings/comics/etc.

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

HJL is Putting Films to Work This Year!

by Livvy Feeney



In 2019, HJL is upping our film game! From closing out a successful film series, to starting a training program on leveraging documentary film for social change, to producing our own narrative-style media, we are engaging with film from all angles to strengthen our work.

We just wrapped up our Housing Justice Film Series last week at Mother Bar+Restaurant with a screening of *The Home Team*. Read a reflection on the film in our February newsletter for more details on the film! The film depicts the harm the construction of the Mercedes Benz stadium caused to historically disinvested Vine City and English Avenue neighborhoods, representative of patterns of inequitable and extractive development in Atlanta. It was a joy to have filmmaker Camille Pendley and community activists join us for a discussion after the film. These screenings have been an engaging way to bring new people into the work, draw connections between housing justice activism in



other cities and our work in Atlanta, and hold a space of dialogue for folks to share their own housing experiences and ideas around organizing. Have ideas on where you'd like to see our next screening happen? Or what film would spark great discussion? Shoot us an email at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com!

Check out a recent article by Emily Weyrauch in Arts ATL covering the series.



Alison learning about an arts and community based organizing collaboration alongside colleagues in the Putting Films to Work cohort.

In an effort to continue growing our knowledge in using documentary film, HJL was selected to be part of a year-long training institute with Putting Films to Work as part of a cohort of eight Georgia-based nonprofits. The training program is an effort "to help organizations embrace nonfiction film as a critical resource and a natural component of what they

do; resource organizations and individual leaders with specific films and the skills to put them to work; and increase the strategic use of documentary films in community settings, creating more opportunities for people in Georgia to engage on issues of critical social and environmental importance." We are joining The Counter Narrative Project, Georgia Appleseed, Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network, Georgia Justice Project, Quest Communities, LaGender, Inc., and Living Room for this program. On April 25th-26th, HJL Executive Director, Alison Johnson, and Quaker Voluntary Service Fellow with HJL, Livvy Feeney, attended a training with the cohort at the Center for Civil and Human Rights which kicked off the program. It was energizing to be in a space with folks dedicated to bridging the gap between filmmakers and community organizations, and we got lots of ideas about incorporating art into our work. We also go to try out virtual reality! We are hopeful that this program is a space for collaboration with



We watched a virtual reality experience about solitary confinement.



community partners and informs our use of film to spark action and build community. We are in the midst of planning future screenings in varied locations to make sure that they are accessible to folks in our communities. Be on the lookout later this year for a film screening collaboratively produced by the organizations in the Putting Films to Work cohort!

In addition to screening already existing media, we are producing our own film clips to document the housing justice movement in Atlanta. A talented team of filmmakers and graphic designers are volunteering their time to create these clips - huge thank you to Ryan, Zak, Cat, and Adam! Through glossy flyers and promotional videos depicting smiling people strolling in the sunshine, the BeltLine Inc crafts a narrative that the path creates joy for all Atlantans. Yet we know the devastating effects is

has had on folks living beside it who couldn't afford the skyrocketing rent or property taxes, pushing out mainly working class black communities to make way for high end retail, drastically changing the culture of those neighborhoods. Documenting the stories of folks who have felt these effects on their communities and sharing their stories through social media is a powerful tool in crafting our own counter-narrative based on folks' lived experiences. HJL filmmaker Adam Patterson's perspective is, "Capturing the stories of residents in these communities is vital for a couple reasons. For one, the discussion of economic development and displacement is an urgent one that must be facilitated. This issue is time sensitive and it affects us all. Also, and equally as important, these interviews serve as the oral histories of our communities. The city elite's focus on ambitious

growth and image management will erase this history unless we record it." In addition, HJL filmmaker Ryan Dutter believes that, "Controlling the narrative is important so the powers that be can't rewrite history." We just released a new clip by Ryan of Peoplestown activist Chris Lemons reflecting on the serious damage the BeltLine could cause in his community, and his hopes for altering this destiny. Find the link to the full video on our Facebook page.

Do you know someone who has personally felt the effects of the BL, and may be interested in sharing it on camera? Let us know!



Peoplestown Resident Chris Lemons Demands [#DevelopmentNotDisplacement](#)

Screenshot of HJL video with Peoplestown resident Chris Lemons.



HJL Holds Political Education Event and Launch for HJL's New Eviction Defense Work in Collaboration with the Redefining Affordable Housing Collective

by Natalie McLaughlin

Donate directly to our Eviction Defense Work and learn about **how to get involved** at www.housingjusticeleague.org/eviction-defense. Can we count on you to share our fundraiser on social media? This is the best way to reach people.

"Eviction defense and affordable housing remain a priority. There are many reasons for evictions and not being able to afford the rent is one of them. We need more affordable housing and we need to continue to fight to minimize evictions."

-Franklin Mack, Organizer with HJL.

On the evening of May 7, Housing Justice League, in collaboration with the Redefining Affordable Housing Collective (RAHC), held a launch for HJL's new Eviction Defense Manual at the Phillip Rush Center. The launch, titled "The County's Eviction Crisis is Ground Zero in Struggles Against Racism, Exploitation, and Dispossession: New Eviction Defense Tools for Fulton County," drew a crowd of approximately 100 people representing different advocacy and service provider organizations, as well as the general public. It was deeply encouraging to see a room packed with people wanting to take action on such a crucial issue displacing Atlanta's Black and low-income communities.

The goals of the event were twofold: to offer a space for political education on the eviction crisis in the Atlanta metro area and its historical context, and to publicize and encourage community engagement with Housing Justice League's new Eviction Defense Manual and outreach plan.

Atlanta is currently facing a brutal eviction crisis in which landlords file 800 evictions against tenants every week. The majority (53 percent) of tenants lose their opportunity to challenge their





eviction in court because they do not file an answer. Many additional tenants file an answer without a proper legal defense or fail to show up to their court date. Any of these actions speed up the eviction process and tenants lose the opportunity to challenge their case. The eviction crisis is unquestionably an issue of racial justice, as the vast majority of evictions are filed against tenants in majority-Black neighborhoods. In response to this crisis, HJL has developed an Eviction Defense Manual to help renters understand their rights within the court eviction process in order to reduce the harm caused by eviction. The manual is nearly complete and will be available at

housingjusticeleague.org/eviction-defense in the beginning of June.

The evening's program was broken into four parts: a presentation of the RAHC Collective Statement, a presentation on the geography of eviction in Atlanta, a panel discussion with community advocates and organizers, and lastly, a presentation of HJL's new Eviction Defense Manual and outreach plan. You can read the Event Program and RAHC Collective Statement in-full at

housingjusticeleague.org/eviction-defense.

Johnnie Kornegay of the Counter Narrative Project and co-organizer of the event opened the evening and invited HJL Member, Richard Hunsinger, to the front to share a presentation of the RAHC Collective Statement. The Statement discusses the formation of RAHC and offers critical historical grounding for our work in resisting eviction. RAHC came together around a

shared interest in the political landscape of housing in Atlanta as well as an understanding of the narrow and exclusive meaning "affordable housing" holds in mainstream political discussions. As the Statement explains,

Our name comes from an often-repeated term that permeates the discourse around [affordable housing] issues in all major cities in this country: "affordable housing." We also deploy the term critically, in order to redefine "affordable housing" in more inclusive terms. We have learned from experience that the word "affordable" in discussions about housing policy and development often does not mean for people with low incomes, for people who rely on public housing, for people of color, for people who have been cast out of their homes because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, for people who experience housing discrimination based on their health or physical ability, for people currently living in the neighborhoods like those of West, South, and Southwest Atlanta, and for people living on the outskirts of the city as the result of the suburbanization of poverty.

RAHC members decided to hold a political education event with the goal of bringing organizations together whose constituencies are harmed by the affordable housing crisis to challenge the conversation around "affordable housing." Members decided to zero in on the eviction crisis in the Atlanta metro area both because it is "a site where the full range of violences related to housing injustice are acutely



on display," and to support the work of Housing Justice League.

After offering this background, the Statement turns its attention to the eviction crisis and its contextualization within the long history of racialized dispossession within the US. The Statement's main argument is that "eviction has its roots in histories of violence and cycles of dispossession that have forced Black communities into a discriminatory and predatory rental market..." and that "this violence is maintained by being made invisible in the same ways it has been made invisible in the past: through the justification of racialized predatory financial practices, and the obscuring of the structural nature of those practices." It sets out to unpack and reveal the structural and historical causes of the eviction crisis in discussing dispossession as a tool used by the white propertied class to maintain its domination in systems of slavery and colonialism. Moving into our contemporary moment, the statement maps

this history onto racialized local and federal housing policy and its connection to subprime mortgage lending and the eviction crisis. To read the full statement visit housingjusticeleague.org/eviction-defense.

Following Richard's presentation we heard from Dani Aiello, a researcher with HJL and co-author of the Eviction Defense Manual. Dani gave an overview of the geography of the eviction crisis in the Atlanta metro area. She shared information about the mapping tool created by the AJC to show where evictions are taking place, and the harm eviction has for tenants such as damage to credit scores and getting pushed "down market" into substandard housing. She also provided an overview of HJL's initial ideas on advocating for particular policy reforms at the State and local levels such as a Right to Counsel and storage for personal belongings, respectively.

The longest part of the event came next with a panel discussion. Panelists included Nasheedah Muhammad, Director of Operations with Lost-n-Found Youth; Elora Raymond, Assistant Professor, School of City and Regional Planning in the College of Design at Georgia Tech; Andrew Thompson, head of the Fulton County Housing Court Assistance Center; and Latresa Chaney, a Tenant Organizer with Housing Justice League. Some themes that emerged from the discussion were the long-lasting trauma of eviction and homelessness; Black women, mothers and children being the group most impacted by eviction; and discussion of the court process and the "Judgment on the Pleadings" court calendar in which hundreds of tenants are evicted en masse



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every week without the opportunity to challenge their case due to failing to include a “proper legal defense” on their Answer Form.



The final section of the night was about action and strategy. Presenters included three HJL Members and organizers, Karimah Dillard, Franklin Mack, and Natalie McLaughlin. Moving forward, with the momentum of the campaign launch behind us, we will need broad-based support from the community in order to effect change. With the eviction manual as a tool, we will work to build relationships with communities hit hardest by the eviction crisis. Our outreach strategy involves mass postcard mailings to buildings with the highest rates of eviction and a phone line where people can leave a message requesting manuals or info sessions. We plan to work with many community leaders and organizations so that knowledge of tenants’ rights in the eviction process can become widespread. If you know of an organization that may be

interested in partnering with us in this work, please let us know!

By no means do we see Eviction Defense as the solution to the eviction and affordable housing crises. As long as landlords and Real Estate players maintain control over land and housing, tenants lack true community control. We see Eviction Defense as a small piece in the much broader work of building up tenant leaders for a City and State-wide movement that can exercise political power and win real renter protections in the State of GA, like rent control. If you want to plug into the work of eviction defense and tenant organizing, email us at

housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com!

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 **housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com**



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events to confirm time, location, and event details!
For all events, please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com if you need childcare.

May 25th 11:30-2pm - *Canvassing in Ashview* - Meeting location to be determined, check the Facebook event for updates. Come knock on doors with us in the Ashview and have conversations about the BeltLine for All campaign! We will be collecting signatures for our BeltLine for All petition and offering folks "House NOT For Sale" signs to let developers know that they will not be moved out of their community.

Wednesday May 29th, 6:30 - *Membership Phonebanking* - **52 Fairlie St NW** - Help us make calls to solidify our membership base, over dinner! This is SUPER important - the future of the organization truly depends on it! If you can't make it there, send us an email and we can give you instructions and a list of numbers to call.

Tuesday June 4, 7:00 pm - *InfoLine Training for Eviction Defense Work* - Location TBA on Facebook and housingjusticeleague.org/events. Are you looking for a way to get involved in sustained economic and racial justice organizing work? Join our Eviction Defense Infoline Response Team and help connect communities being hit with the eviction crisis to HJL's Eviction Defense work. Children always welcome, light meal provided. Please RSVP on our FB Events Page!

June 8th 11:30-2pm - *Canvassing in Chosewood* - Meeting location to be determined, check the Facebook event for updates. Come knock on

doors with us in the Chosewood and have conversations about the BeltLine for All campaign! We will be collecting signatures for our BeltLine for All petition and offering folks "House NOT For Sale" signs to let developers know that they will not be moved out of their community.

Sunday, June 9, 2019 2:00 - 8:00 PM - HJL Table at Atlanta Streets Alive: Cross-City 2019 - Howell Mill Rd, Marietta St, Decatur St and DeKalb Ave, Atlanta, GA. Our exact location along the route is to be determined, check the Facebook event for updates. Come table with us and talk to folks about #BeltLine4All! Having a presence at this event which celebrates alternative transportation to cars is important in starting conversations about ensuring that developments like the BeltLine truly benefit all Atlantans, not just people who can afford to live and dine alongside it. Email us at housingjusticeleagueatl.org if you want to table with us! (link to FB event online)

Tuesday June 18, 6:30pm - *HJL June Mass Meeting* - **1040 Crew St SW 30315**. We will discuss HJL's new bylaws!!! It will be a potluck, so please bring a dish if you are able. If you're a newcomer, come at 6pm for an orientation to our work!



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May Shout Outs!

Housing Justice League extends our gratitude to all the amazing volunteers making the housing justice movement in Atlanta possible this month. Special thanks to:

Melissa, Kaylynn, Emily, Romunda, and Greg for supporting us at the HJL Membership Phone Bank and Pizza Parties!

All of the presenters, organizers, photographers, and videographers at our Eviction Defense Campaign Launch, especially the

panelists Nasheedah Muhammad, Elora Raymond, Andrew Thompson, and Latresa Chaney. Also a huge thank you to Johnnie Kornegay and Charles Stephens with the Counter Narrative Project for all of their insight and logistical support.

Franklin, Diane, and Clifford for their support on developing an awesome information session guide for our eviction defense work.

Cristina and Bill for their support on website updates!



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!

Stay in the loop here:

