



Housing Justice League Newsletter

September 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Thursday Sept 20 6:00 pm - Membership Development Phonebank Pizza Party 75 **Marietta St Atlanta GA 30303**. Join us to make phone calls and sign people up for HJL membership! Members can give as little as \$1 a month to sustain our work, we just need help letting folks know!

Tuesday Sept 25 5:30 pm - BeltLine Quarterly Meeting **Park Tavern in Piedmont Park 500 10th St. NE Atlanta 30309**. Our goal is to continue to engage with Beltline Inc. to provide pressure and support to meet and expand the affordable housing goal of the Beltline.

Thursday Oct. 11 6:30 pm - Tenant Organizing Training **1040 Crew St SW Atlanta 30315**.

How to start a tenant association, protect tenant rights, and stop displacement! Please email housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com for location and to RSVP!

Tuesday August 21 7:00 pm, 6:30 orientation for newcomers - 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, the BeltLine for All campaign, and more!



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.

Go to www.housingjusticeleague.org to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, learn about membership, or check out our upcoming events!

Follow us at facebook.com/housingjusticeleague to keep up to date with what's going on in the organization and housing-related politics.

TENANT ORGANIZING

THE DARLINGTON RESIDENTS HOLD RALLY TO SHINE A SPOTLIGHT ON TRACE McCREARY: "CEO OF GENTRIFICATION"

CALL THESE NUMBERS: Jennifer Eid, City Council Representative, District 6: (404) 330-6049; Matt Westmoreland, Post 2 At Large City Council: (404) 330-6302; Michael Julian Bond, Post 1 At Large City Council: (404) 330-6770; Keisha Lance Bottoms, Mayor: (404) 330-6100

Script: "I am calling to express my great concern for the forced displacement of tenants from the Darlington. What will you be doing to ensure ALL tenants are relocated to safe, decent, affordable housing? What will you be doing to ensure that mass eviction events like this are no longer acceptable in Atlanta?"

On Monday, September 17 tenants at the Darlington Apartment Complex in Buckhead and community allies held a rally to shine a light on their inhumane treatment by landlord Trace McCreary of Varden Capital Properties who purchased the longtime affordable complex a year ago.



At the time of the purchase, tenants were told they would finally receive the renovations which were decades overdue. The new owner understood fully the immediacy and extent of the issues that would need addressing, such as rampant black mold throughout the building and a faulty AC system. Varden Capital Properties however left these issues unaddressed and then told residents in late August that they would all be forced to vacate the property indefinitely with only 60 days notice. This follows a repeated pattern across the nation of displacing

low-income people of color from their communities in order to renovate and raise rents to levels that only wealthier individuals can make. It also exemplifies the astounding precarity of tenancy in Georgia, where tenants essentially have no legal protections such as Just Cause eviction laws, and landlords are at perfect liberty to evict 600 tenants at once with only 60 days notice.

This kind of property flipping is nothing new to Varden Capital CEO Trace McCreary who apparently left Wall Street after the financial crash to focus on building wealth off the crisis that left 11 million Americans without a home and forced them into tenancy. Their website states it clearly: "Varden Capital Properties (VCP) was founded in 2011 with the objective of acquiring undervalued real estate, repositioning the asset and creating positive returns for its investors." So far VCP has purchased around 20k units in the South, almost all of which are occupied affordable units which he then flips to mostly luxury developments.

Since the time of the 60-day notice that tenants were given in August, the AC and hot water have been shut off and there have been four fires inside the complex. The freight elevator is also broken forcing already financially-strained residents to pay movers to take their belongings out or else risk their security deposit for leaving "trash" in their apartment. VCP has also started building renovations, knocking down walls while tenants are

still living inside, spreading mold and asbestos through the air, and causing hazardous structural damage to the building which has led to at least one ceiling collapse in a tenant's apartment. "There is no peace for us, days without hot water to bathe, laundry machines that destroy our clothes, and an owner who would allow kids in this building to go to sleep in puddles of sweat from no air. This is not fair, this is not right, this is not justice!" stated Darlington tenant, LeBraunte Frost.

As one resident, Te'Nina Daniels explained, VCP is a professional corporate landlord. They know just where they can toe the line to save money on operating costs and squeeze every penny they can from tenants, without getting in serious legal trouble. VCP's network of well-connected corporate lawyers stands in sharp contrast to any available tenant legal aid. The vast majority of tenants appear in eviction court unrepresented and hence at a serious disadvantage.

The crisis situation has brought residents together and their organizing has already led to some successes such as ensuring the "help clinics" on September 19th and 25th talk of bringing back a portion of the renovated building as "affordable" through tax credits within City Council. They have also corrected misinformation Hammond Residential was spreading among City Council to make the situation seem under control by drastically understating the number of residents without a place to go and the amount of time residents have been without AC.

At this point residents want support identifying decent, safe, and affordable housing in the communities in which they live and work, which has been a major challenge. Residents have come up with a set of demands to the City and Varden Capital Properties:

- "Hammond Residential and Varden Capital Properties must treat Darlington residents with dignity and respect while they are still here. This means:

- No scare tactics and no retaliation such as breaking up tenant meetings
- The AC and hot water must be on. Denying access to these must not be used as a retaliatory tactic!
- Cease demolition/renovation of the building until ALL residents are relocated. This is causing highly dangerous and life-threatening living conditions for residents.

- The City and Varden Capital properties must ensure the relocation of ALL residents to DECENT, affordable housing. We will not stop until every resident has a place to go.
- The City must act on the affordable housing crisis, stop tax giveaways to luxury developers, and invest in truly affordable housing. Mass displacement events like this are all too common in a city where there is a severe shortage of affordable housing."



Atlanta is experiencing a perfect storm for mass displacement. With 95% of everything built since 2012 qualifying as luxury housing and a loss of 5% of affordable housing stock every year since 2012 we may be experiencing the largest displacement of long term residents in Atlanta history. "For those of us who live in the few affordable housing developments available in the city, we find ourselves displaced with the race for newer properties and affordable properties renovating to keep up," stated Darlington tenant Raymond Bushby.

PEOPLESTOWN RESIDENTS WIN RETRIAL AFTER PRESENTING NEW EVIDENCE

Peoplestown residents returned to court on Wednesday Sept. 5 at 11 a.m. before Judge Schwall seeking a rehearing based on newly discovered evidence. That evidence, an email authored by a City of Atlanta engineer, establishes that the City of Atlanta knew, BEFORE it demolished 21 of 27 homes on the block, that it did not need the properties for its proposed flood mitigation project. This email was produced by the City in response to a discovery request 3 days after Judge Schwall first ruled that the City needed the property. The delayed production of this highly relevant information is consistent with the culture at City Hall that has prompted the ongoing investigation by the GBI.



Despite having produced more than 200,000 documents, the City has failed to produce evidence rebutting this internal Department of Watershed communication. Tanya Washington, a Peoplestown resident, said, "Had I gone to court and been presented with credible evidence that my house was needed for the City's plans I would have taken the loss and moved on. I wouldn't be happy with the situation but at least I would know that there was a real reason for taking my home. But when a City employee documents that the homes are my block aren't necessary and there is NO evidence to the contrary, I'm ready to go all the way to the Supreme Court for justice, and I SHALL NOT BE

MOVED!"

The outcome in these cases will create precedence that will either protect residents against these types of land grabs by the City, or it will give the green light to city officials, authorizing them to steal people's homes without following the law. The residents are asking "Housing Mayor" Keisha Lance Bottoms to drop the lawsuits against them.

A note from Tanya Washington:

"To those who stood with us in court today, who called the Mayor's office and asked that she do the right thing and drop the case, and/or who made a prayer of encouragement and support, THANK YOU!! We are humbled by your love!

The Judge ordered the City of Atlanta to return to Court on Oct. 29 at 2:30 with the former City of Atlanta engineer who documented the lack of "technical data" and "engineering validation" to justify the taking of homes on our block. We are looking forward to this hearing which will establish that THE CITY OF ATLANTA'S USE OF EMINENT DOMAIN IS ILLEGAL!

This is a VICTORY that proves 3 incontrovertible truths: WHEN YOU FIGHT YOU WIN, COMMUNITY IS A VERB & COURAGE IS CONTAGIOUS! Thank you for standing with us!"

Right now as more residents in Washington Park, Vine City, and English Ave we are asking folks to continue to call the Mayor and ask her not to use eminent domain to forcibly take people's homes for development projects.

Go to www.wabe.org > "Peoplestown Residents Win New Hearing In Their Fight Against the City"



STAND WITH THE TRANSIT EQUITY COALITION, AND HELP US DEMAND A FAIR MARTA EXPANSION

MARTA is finally expanding. But for the most part, efforts at collecting public input through the More MARTA program have been relatively low-key – it's safe to say that the majority of Atlantans have no idea that this initiative is underway. Which means that right now it is unlikely that the final expansion plan will reflect the true wants and needs of Atlanta's commuters.

In 2016, Atlanta voters approved a half-cent sales tax to fund the expansion of MARTA. The tax is expected to generate \$2.5 billion over 40 years. Since the tax was passed, MARTA has been fine-tuning a list of potential bus and rail projects to improve service in various parts of the city.

One of the projects that is garnering the most attention is the Clifton Corridor Light Rail Transit (LRT) project, a streetcar that will link Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to Lindbergh Center Station in Buckhead. The issue with the emphasis on the Clifton Corridor Project is that Emory University and the CDC were annexed into the City of Atlanta in 2017 – after the sales tax was passed. It is unfair that this project, which will receive \$500 million of the \$2.5 billion in MARTA funds, is being prioritized over the communities in south and southwest Atlanta that have been asking for improved MARTA service for years.

According to the More MARTA program's questionable survey results, two more proposed projects that are on track to become a reality soon involve building a light rail along segments of the Beltline. The Atlanta Beltline has become the city's main driver of gentrification as it causes property values to skyrocket. Though the forces behind the Beltline initially promised that the project would lead to the development of 5,600 units of affordable housing, they are far behind where they should be. The More MARTA program's prioritization of a Beltline streetcar over transit improvements in south Atlanta communities is a slap in the face to the



neighborhoods that are bracing themselves for Beltline-generated displacement. The More MARTA program should not spend a single cent on the Beltline rail project until the Beltline fulfills its commitment to affordable housing.

The Transit Equity Coalition is an alliance of civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, and neighborhood associations who are working to hold MARTA accountable to the true needs of the community. Our members are:

American Friends Service Committee
Atlanta NAACP
Concerned Black Clergy
DeKalb NAACP
Housing Justice League
Our Truth, Our Power – The South Atlanta
Listening Project
United Youth Adult Conference

We are asking everyone to call their Atlanta city councilmember at (404) 330-6030 and demand that they put pressure on MARTA to:

1. Cut the Clifton Corridor rail project
2. Expand the west rail line from Hamilton E. Holmes station to Fulton Industrial, and the east rail line to Stonecrest along I-20.
3. Refrain from funding a streetcar on the Beltline until the Beltline begins to live up to its affordable housing promises.