



Housing Justice League Newsletter

January 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ to confirm time and location of events!

January 27 BeltLine4All Canvassing
10:30 am - Meet @ Peoplestown
Revitalization Corporation (1101 Hank
Aaron Drive) for a brief training before
canvassing community members to come
out to our upcoming workshops!

February 20 HJL Mass Meeting - 7:00 pm
start, with orientation for newcomers at
6:30 - @ Rick McDevitt Center (1040 Crew
St SW, Atlanta, GA 30315) - breakouts of
interest for tenant associations, the
BeltLine for All campaign, and outreach!

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.

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE 2017: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Last month Housing Justice League held its annual holiday party where we enjoyed a slideshow of images from the past year and reflected on all that we have accomplished in 2017, "A Year of Resistance!" And the slideshow made clear that it has been a lot! From January to December Housing Justice League's membership, leadership, and supporters have brought local and national attention to the ways in which our communities defend their right to remain and win a more just city that works for long term, black, and low-income residents rather than just greedy developers.

This review of 2017 pictured residents of all ages dedicated to one another and to speaking truth to power, building up their communities based in respect and caring in the face of greedy elites and a government that often treats us as disposable and ignorant. Highlights included Tent City, resisting eviction in Peoplestown, building national alliances through the National Alliance for HUD Tenants and the Homes for All campaign, and our research and campaign around the Atlanta BeltLine and the mass displacement it is causing.

The images from the first half of the year portrayed the Turner Field communities' sustained fight for a



Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) to ensure that the development of Turner Field would benefit surrounding neighborhoods through environmental improvements and increased access to good jobs and needed services and amenities. Residents across Peoplestown, Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburgh developed the CBA in a years-long democratic process, beginning in November 2013 when the Braves announced they were leaving Turner Field. This process involved more than 1,700 people and sought to proactively counteract the predictable approach to mega developments: backroom deals, top-down planning, and wealth extraction from communities. Despite these incredible efforts, Carter Development and Georgia State University, along with city officials still proved determined to shut down community involvement and refused to give communities a seat at the table. Instead they spread lies through

the media that all residents were asking for was a cash payout!

This was the context in which the 63-day Tent City encampment at Turner Field began. Residents made huge sacrifices for each other in a fight to gain some level of community control in the development process by holding space and bringing injustice to the attention of the broader public. And it worked. The pressure forced Carter and GSU into a position of negotiation. The surrounding

neighborhoods won a Community Trust Fund of \$5 million on the spring of 2017 promising a certain level of benefits to the community. The trust fund however is not sustainable benefit to communities in the way a CBA would have been. The city has not made a commitment to channeling more money into the fund. The Tent City encampment ended without the community's consent in a police raid that forced residents out of the Turner Field property. But we will not be silenced. The Coalition for Community Benefits is still moving forward to get community control of the trust fund, and HJL is a part of that work.

This year Housing Justice League has also been hard at work strengthening our alliances with regional and national housing rights coalitions. Several of our tenant leaders are participants of the National Alliance of HUD Tenants which helps to hold government accountable to HUD tenants. Deborah Arnold, an organizer with the Rosa Burney tenants association in Atlanta





and a board member of NAHT, participated on a panel at the NAHT conference in Washington DC in June! Another area of alliance building this year has been with the Homes for All campaign. HJL went to Nashville to meet with one of our partner organizations in the Homes for All (HFA) national campaign about their

own fight against Carter Development, the same development group that bought out Turner Field in Atlanta. This fall HJL also helped to form HFA South, a regional coalition of housing rights organizations that is part of the national HFA campaign. This spring we are organizing the first conference for HFA South during which we

will share our organizations' experience and knowledge through three days of workshops and other programming.

And last but not least, we saw images of the BeltLine research project and the beginnings of the BeltLine for All campaign that we launched in October. Through BeltLine for All we are working to reverse the unjust trends that have been set with the Atlanta BeltLine development project. The BeltLine promised much needed services and opportunities to historically disinvested communities, but failed to create policies to protect longtime residents from the rising housing costs that the BeltLine causes. We will not allow this project to continue on its current track of mass displacement. In the coming months we are bringing residents together through popular education workshops and direct action to fight for our right to remain. We hope you can join us at our upcoming events!

TENANT ASSOCIATIONS

ATLANTA VOLUNTEER LAWYERS FOUNDATION TENANTS RIGHTS WORKSHOP

This past week, on the evening of Tuesday, January 9th, the tenant association for City View at Rosa Burney Park in Mechanicsville organized a workshop on the renters' rights, with a presentation by the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation (AVLF). According to their mission statement, AVLF is a local organization that develops and coordinates programs to provide legal representation, education, and advocacy for at-risk, low-income individuals. Organizations like this are a crucial resource for renters in communities that increasingly see their housing needs undermined by a lack of affordable housing offered throughout the city. Meanwhile,



property owners, managers, and investors stand to profit from the looming prospect of gentrification.

Tuesday night's focus was on the ways that renters can protect themselves and improve the quality of their living situations under the current State of Georgia landlord-tenant laws. The presentation included helpful reminders of cautions to take when first entering into a lease agreement including: never rent a unit without seeing and thoroughly inspecting the actual unit, never rent a unit based on promises that are not in writing, and always read the lease in its entirety. Additionally, the lawyers gave recurring reminders throughout the presentation to always have agreements, receipts, and transactions in writing.



This piece of advice is especially important regarding repairs because it can reduce the blame that a landlord is able to place upon a tenant. All repair requests and correspondences regarding repairs should be in writing, whether electronically or on paper, and should have a written acknowledgment by the landlord. A renter should be quick to address an issue, in writing, to their landlord. Oftentimes, a landlord may be responsible for damages or expenses renters incur while living in the unit because of their failure to make repairs. For example, if a utility bill seems high, it may be due to faulty pipes or wiring.

On the topic of evictions, the workshop offered some ways in which tenants can more easily advocate for themselves. They discussed how some practices by landlords, such as prematurely shutting

off utilities or changing locks, are explicitly illegal and constitute an illegal eviction. They also explained that eviction notices require a response from the tenant within 7 days of receiving one, and that AVL F provides legal counsel in giving a response. AVL F is also available to give other legal advice when tenants are faced with evictions.

Tenants in attendance had the opportunity to directly address questions of their own situations and issues, revealing the personal side of the oppressive landscape renters face in Atlanta. Tenants discussed rents that had been raised before the expiration of a lease, a flatly illegal practice of landlords, but one all-too-commonly known in neighborhoods experiencing early signs of gentrification from new development. One person in attendance raised issues of discrepancies in treatment from landlords regarding allowed overnight stays, claiming that they had been experiencing greater scrutiny from their landlord regarding who they live with than other tenants. This served as a good example of the need for cooperative relationships between tenants. Tenant associations can be spaces where residents are able to talk about these issues together. For example tenants can learn how to better negotiate a lease and then help other residents negotiate better leases for themselves as well.

Overall we saw that renters must take great care and attention to ensure their best interests, and that the arm of the law will largely not be on tenants' side. Georgia is a state that heavily favors the position and interests of landlords over those of renters causing an environment that requires great attention from renters. It is also important that we stay aware of the resources available for renter representation, like the AVL F, and spaces where we can build power together, like tenant associations. A clear picture of the state law's allegiance to landlords in most cases is illustrated by a repeated point made in the literature handed out that night, "If it's not in writing, it did not happen!"

If you or someone you know is in need of accessible legal advice, contact the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation through their website at www.avlf.org or by calling them at 404-521-0790.

BELTLINE FOR ALL CAMPAIGN



The BeltLine for All campaign is gearing up for action in 2018! We are planning a series of canvassing days and popular education workshops for the first three months of 2018. The workshops will be for community residents to find out about resources that will help them stay in their homes and to learn about different policy goals we can organize around to protect residents from rising housing prices. We will be canvassing before each workshop to ask residents to attend and we would love your help! Check out the dates and times of events at www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ and let us know if you can make it. The first workshop for residents will be on Thursday February 8 at 6:30 @ Heritage Station Community Room Building 4 – 765 McDaniel Street Southwest Atlanta, GA, 30310. If you are interested in getting involved with BeltLine for All contact Richard Hunsinger at hunsingerrichard@gmail.com

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNSHIP

In 2018 Housing Justice League will be developing and launching a new community leadership program as a way of investing in the leadership development and education of residents right here in our neighborhoods.

If you are interested please speak with Alison Johnson (ajohnson@peopletown.org 770-895-9074). We will provide a more detailed description of roles and responsibilities on our website and for people who express interest.

What?

An internship (around 4 hours/week) for community members living in NPU-V to learn about community organizing and participate in HJL's different areas of work including:

- Tenants associations
- BeltLine for All Campaign
- Anti-eviction work
- Community outreach

Interns will meet weekly with HJL leaders for guidance in their work.

Why?

Housing Justice League believes that in order to challenge and change injustice in our society, we must build political power and control in the communities directly impacted by those injustices.

We also understand that many people in our neighborhoods struggle with limited economic resources and educational opportunities. The goal of the internship is to help residents learn valuable skills in community organizing with the benefits of some financial support.

When?

The internship will begin in February. We will communicate the official start date with our applicants. **The application will be released next Wednesday, February 24 and will be available on our website www.housingjusticeleague.org.**

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

We need a web developer that can help us set up recurring donation payments on our website using the Stripe payment processing program. We have a development plan, but need a skilled developer that has experience working with REST API's, cloud development, and app security to help us build it!

This isn't a large app development project – we just need help building a small cloud plugin that can help us get monthly donations from members to support our community work. If you have any questions or would like to volunteer, please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com.