

Appendix II (additional documentation and relevant articles)

<http://www.onedconline.org/peoplesplatform>

The People's Platform Demands

Community Control over Land Use:

District of Columbia's government is not a corporation. Our public officials should not act as developers selling public assets off to various corporate or private interests without any real assessment of the needs of the DC public. This form of governance led by free-market values has facilitated the loss of valuable public property. Community involvement in this process has been severely curtailed. For the most part, these transactions are simply giveaways to private developers. Real community control over land use ends these corrupt giveaways and requires public land be used to meet the community's needs, not political/private interests.

Demands:

1. **Vote against the Soccer Stadium Deal.** The focus of DC officials should not be to recruit a private developer to produce yet another stadium that will ultimately displace existing residents and generate seasonal, lowly paid jobs.
2. **Pass legislation that would stop the devolution of the 27 vacant properties that Office of Planning and Economic Development is currently auctioning off.** These parcels should be placed into a Community Land Trust, which will allow for permanently affordable housing and community space.
3. **Introduce and immediately pass Clawback Legislation** to force developers to be held accountable if they receive corporate welfare benefits and then fail to deliver jobs or affordable housing for residents.

Equitable Development without Displacement:

Equitable development means that any urban development project meets the needs of the existing residents, including long-time, low-income residents of color. Much of the development in this city has been geared towards recruiting wealthier "millennials," while ignoring the housing and land-use needs of families. DC's commitment to equitable development without displacement requires that public dollars are spent to generate living-wage, unionized jobs, permanently affordable housing, worker-owner cooperatives, progressive tax schemes and much more.

Demands:

1. **Provide funding for all units who want to purchase their buildings.** Utilize TOPA to create collective models of affordable home ownership by prioritizing the creation of limited equity co-ops with Housing Production Trust Fund money. Currently, the vast majority of tenants are unable to take advantage of the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act because of the speculative nature of the DC Housing Market. DHCD should use HTPF money to help make collective home ownership a viable option for tenants going through the TOPA process. There are many ways this could be done. For example, DHCD could fund complete renovations of properties contingent on the tenants being able to purchase those properties. Also, the District could exercise its right to purchase these properties and sell them back to the tenants at an affordable rate. These proposals would enable many more tenant purchases and also promote equitable community revitalization.
2. **Introduce and pass legislation that gives tenants the right to purchase their building whenever a developer attempts to opt out of their Section 8 project based contract.** Currently, developers and owners are trying to cash in on the changing demographic of the city. As such, they are using every ‘legal’ displacement tactic in the book. For instance, Mid-City Financial is one owner that has ended several project-section 8 contracts and proceeded to only renovate and update vacant units while actively suppressing tenants’ right to organize.
3. **Introduce and pass a moratorium on all proposed Public Housing demolition and redevelopment.** DC government has not been able to show that the New Communities Initiative is capable of providing a true one for one replacement of public housing or that it is anything less than a thinly veiled giveaway or valuable land to developers. District Government should commit to keeping all current public housing units online and immediately rehab and repair off-line units to address the current homelessness crisis. Furthermore, the District should immediately repair and rehab current units that are not up to code.
4. **Approve at least 7.8 million dollars in Housing Production Trust Fund monies for the additional units of deep affordability at Parcel 42.** Residents have long demanded that the promise of Parcel 42 be protected. Gray’s administration rejected residents’ call for investing our tax dollars in the development of Parcel 42, claiming too many working class people of color live in the Shaw area so the project should be primarily market-rate. We reject this area. How can there possibly be a concentration of working class residents in Shaw especially since this neighborhood is one of the fastest gentrifying areas in the city. If anything, the Shaw neighborhood has become a concentration of wealth, displacing the working-class at an astonishing rate. Protect the promise of Parcel 42 and immediately repeal the Office of Planning and Economic Development’s decision not to invest deeper subsidies on this site.

Permanent Housing Affordability:

Housing should not be a commodity in DC; it must be considered a right. The speculative and privatized approach DC officials have towards developing housing in the city has left thousands

of DC residents homeless and much more enduring massive rent burdens or risking eviction. To make matters worse, the city adheres to the federal definition of affordable housing set by the Area Median Income (AMI), which allows the city to claim the creation of affordable housing that often does not meet the needs of long-time, low-income DC residents of color. Lastly, the city has allowed the speculative aspect of housing to result in the loss of units covered under affordability covenants, permitting private owners to ‘opt-out’ and cajole affordable housing renters to move out in order to recruit wealthier residents to take their place.

Demands:

- 1. Immediately address the homelessness crisis by investing in both permanent hard stock affordable housing units and long-term subsidies such as the Local Rent Supplement Program.** Immediate investment is needed to empty all shelters, including DC General. Currently, there are thousands homeless men, women and children on the streets and in shelters. Homeless families are being warehoused in an abandoned hospital that sits between a jail and an STD clinic. Moreover, failed policy on both a national and local level have ballooned the District’s subsidized housing waitlist. Because we find ourselves in this place, we must recognize the need for shelter capacity in order to keep people off the streets. Therefore, we demand a moratorium on the loss of any current shelter capacity and further demand that facilities for both families and singles comply with the DC Housing code.
- 2. Introduce and pass legislation that places a moratorium on rents being raised on tenants as a result of federal or local affordability covenants expiring.** DC government should immediately set aside local funds to subsidize tenants at their current rent levels in these buildings. In the next five years, the city is projected to lose thousands of affordable housing units produced through tax-exempt bonds and low-income housing tax credits. Action must be taken now to start to address this issue.
- 3. Introduce and pass legislation to strengthen rent control by eliminating Hardship Petitions.** Hardships are used by Developers to eliminate rent control in DC. Developers can file these petitions to raise rents high enough to drive current tenants out of their buildings. Increases routinely double tenants’ rents and force them out of their buildings. DC law entitles landlords to these increases to guarantee that their profits remain high while people are driven from their homes. Hardship Petitions should be ended immediately.
- 4. Completely overhaul the Inclusionary Zoning program so that it creates truly affordable units at increased numbers.** The current program was implemented in 2007 and has yet to create any real affordability. Instead the program creates “affordable housing” for people making over \$60,000 per year. The percentage of IZ units required in all new developments should be increased and those units should include those at 0-30% as well as 30 to 60% of the AMI.

Community and Family Wealth Creation:

Washington, DC is one of the most inequitable places in the country, where the top fifth of earners make \$259k on average, and the bottom fifth earn only \$9k. We demand policies that will transform this worsening trend.

Demands:

1. **Introduce and pass legislation to immediately increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for ALL workers.** In order to afford a market-rate housing unit in the city, an individual must earn \$27 an hour, more than 2X our *future* minimum wage of 11.50. Raising the minimum wage will help to reduce the tremendous burden placed on low-income residents.
2. **Provide a budget allocation for worker cooperative development, provide tax incentives for worker cooperatives, and change its procurement policies to favor worker cooperatives.** Worker cooperatives are businesses owned and managed democratically by their employees. They produce an array of economic benefits for low-income communities and have the potential to reduce economic disparity on a long-term basis. They tend to provide higher wages and better economic benefits than other small businesses.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit status

“The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog www.dcfpi.org

Too Many DC Families Live on \$2 a Day: It’s Time to Do More to Help Families Thrive By Ed Lazere September 16, 2015

Hard as it is to picture, a growing number of DC families have to live on less than \$2 a day, and decisions by Mayor Bowser and the DC Council will help determine whether this problem gets worse over the next year -- or better.

Recent cuts in income assistance mean that 13,000 DC children are in families with incomes this low, and a pending time limit in DC’s TANF welfare-to-work program could reduce families’ incomes even further starting next year...

In DC, the issue of time limits stems from legislation adopted in 2010 and 2011, which reduced cash assistance benefits for families who have received TANF benefits for more than 60 months. Those benefits now equal \$152 a month for a family of three -- about \$1.70 per day per person. Under the law, families that reach 60 months will lose all cash assistance in October 2016.”

TANF recipients who do not yet exceed the 60 months limit will receive if funded an increase of their income benefits to 40% of the Federal Poverty Level by FY 2017, a level that would be close to the present Maryland benefit.

The following was included in the testimony of David Schwartzman representing the DC Statehood Green Party to the DC Council, Committee of the Whole, May 8, 2015:

Estimate of funding required to bring TANF income benefit up to the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

According to the October 30, 2014 CBPP report* the DC monthly benefit for a family of 3 is \$428 corresponding to 26.0% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (\$428 corresponds to what Brenda C. Perkins, Chief, Office of Administrative Support (DHS) sent me last February on my request for a family of 3 "Maximum Monthly TANF Benefit for Families Who Have Received TANF Less than 60 Months".

Therefore this family of 3 would get \$1,646/month at the Federal Poverty Level ($428/0.26 = 1,646$). Assuming a total of 40,000 recipients (the 2011 level according the DCFPI report), and that all families correspond to 3 members (yes I know this is an approximation), there would be 13,300 families, each receiving an income benefit at the FPL, totaling \$22 million/month or \$264 million per year. *What appears to confirm this estimate is the fact that the actual budget for income support is \$70 million (FY 2015 budget request), which happens to be 27% of the \$264 million estimate, showing that the family of 3 assumption is a good approximation, unless this is a coincidence [which is unlikely].*

Conclusion: just considering TANF alone, to bring all recipients to the FPL will require a total budget of \$264 million or \$194 million of additional funding for this year. I note that the same CBPP report says that DC is at 54.4% of the FPL for TANF + SNAP benefit, again assuming the maximum for a family of 3. If we assume 40,000 recipients will get TANF + SNAP benefits equal to the FPL, and all SNAP comes from the federal source, then the additional TANF funding required would of course be lower than \$194 million, approximately \$120 million of additional funding would be required to reach the FPL. This estimate is rather modest given the size of the DC budget, and if implemented would have a major impact towards reducing child poverty.

If in addition DC provided a living wage of approximately \$15/hr starting this year, with COL indexing, then a 2018 goal of eliminating child poverty would be achievable, also recognizing that the number of TANF recipients could be reduced as a more effective transition to employment were implemented at the same time, requiring complementary funding for child care, adult literacy, mental health and substance abuse, and of course job opportunities.

*Source cited: TANF Cash Benefits Have Fallen by More Than 20 Percent in Most States and Continue to Erode, By Ife Floyd and Liz Schott, October 30, 2014, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Zoning Issue

An Open Letter to Elected Officials in the District of Columbia and Candidates for Citywide Office

We the undersigned believe that DC government's planning and development agencies have been effectively captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate. Judged by any relevant standard -- the American Institute of Certified Planners' Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct; the work product of planners in other American cities; responsible stewardship of public assets; and basic principles of democracy -- our planning and development agencies are failing.

It is time for change. And, change -- in both personnel and institutional culture -- is urgent because unelected bureaucrats and Commissioners are making major decisions that will have lasting consequences for our city's future. Profoundly dysfunctional planning practices and poor decision-making across the City have resulted in the displacement of longtime residents; the loss of small businesses; a surge in homelessness; and a crisis in housing affordability.

As voters and politically engaged citizens, we expect our elected officials to take responsibility for this situation and to use their powers -- of appointment, confirmation, oversight, budgeting, and legislation -- to ensure that policy choices are made democratically and with equal consideration for all neighborhoods; that agencies follow the law; that

the preferences and interests of citizens are taken no less seriously than those of developers; that public land is used to serve public needs; and that actual planning (e.g. data collection and analysis, coordination among agencies) precedes and informs decisionmaking.

Toward that end, we request that

- any action on the proposed zoning regulations be deferred until after a robust public discussion of (and a Council vote on) amendments to the Comprehensive Plan,
- the incoming Mayor appoint a new Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, a new Director of the Office of Planning, and a new member of Zoning Commission,

Coalition for Better Planning Open Letter to Officials and Candidates September 2014 Page 2

· the Council require, as a condition of confirmation, that candidates for these positions have a track record of, and a commitment to, constructive engagement with diverse groups of citizens, and that

· decisions on controversial public land PUDs be postponed until after these new leaders have been appointed and confirmed.

The following 157 DC residents have endorsed this letter as of September 15th 2014:

Gerri Adams-Simmons Carole Lewis Anderson Karlene Armstead Carol Aten Bénédicte Aubrun Willie L. Baker, Jr. Mathew Bader Allison Basile Mary Belcher Detrice Belt Gerald Bemis Sherrill Berger Philip J. Blair, Jr. Wendy Blair Mary Bolton Lyndi Borne Renee Bowser Dorothy Brizill Mary Buckley John Chelen Judy Chesser George R. Clark John Cloud Melba Conway Carolyn "Callie" Cook Charles Crews Bill Crews Janna Daniels Tim D'Emilio Jean-Christophe Deverines Christy Dickens Robin Diener Guy Durant Jenefer Ellingston Charles Ellis Erin Fairbanks Derek Farwagi Nkechi Feaster David Frankel Linda Frees Franklin Garcia Marta Perez Garcia Alma Gates Harry F. Gates Richard A. Graham Sara Green Miriam Gusevich Ted Guthrie Colleen Hackett Debby Hanrahan John Hanrahan Ann Hargrove Larry Hargrove Sue Hemberger Marci Hilt Jane Huntington George Idelson Denis James Anise Jenkins Judi Jones Michelle Jones Sam Jordan William Jordan Cassandra Joseph Barbara Kahlow Jeffrey Kraskin Kathryn Kross Bobbi Krengel George Lang Linda Leaks Virginia Lee Bart Leonard Mary Alice Levine Marcy Logan Michael Lovendusky Camille Loya Peter Lyden Sharon Lyden Marge Maceda Susan MacKnight Sara Maddux Meg Maguire David Marlin Susan McCarty Mary McReynolds Amy B. McVey Teri Memolo Cy Merkezias Will Merrifield Elizabeth Mills Barbara Morgan Anthony Muhammad Holly Muhammad Lucille E. Murphy Rosemary Ndubuizu Carolyn Dungee Nicholas Abigail Nichols Cristina Nigro Marybeth Onyeukwu Patricia Ortman Chris Otten Jerry Peloquin Pete Perry Claudia Phelps Chyla Pondexter Evanna Powell David F. Power Perry Redd Belinda Reeder Wanda Reif Johnnie Scott Rice Laura Richards Bob Richards Suzanne Richardson Glenda Jean Richmond Michele Rivard Robert Robinson Joyce Robinson-Paul Andrea Rosen Mary Pat Rowan Mary Rowse John Salatti Linda Schmitt

David Schwartzman James E. Scott Anne Sellin Karen Settles Patrick Sheary Sonia Silbert Marilyn Simon Juliet G. Six Thomas M. Smith William "Spence" Spencer Frank Staroba Joan Sterling Jean Stewart Nancy Sturm Anne C. Sullivan William Phillip Thomas Doreen Thompson David Tisel Toussaint Tyson Kirby Vining Cheryl Wagner Steve Waller Frazer Walton Khadijah Watson Leonard Watson David Irving Weiner Gretchen Wharton Earl Williams Cathy Wiss Daniel Wolkoff Mary C. Young Hugh Youngblood John Zottoli Arden Staroba

For more information, contact CoalitionforBetterPlanning@gmail.com

<http://dcoz.dc.gov/trans/140212zc.pdf>

PUBLIC HEARING IN THE MATTER OF: Title 11, Zoning Regulations : Case No.

Comprehensive Text Revisions : 08-06A :: Wednesday, February 12, 2014 Community Room 4058 Minnesota Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C.

TESTIMONY BY EUGENE PURYEAR (Ward 8 resident)

Well, good evening to the Commission. I thank the Commissioners for this opportunity. Again, my name is Eugene Puryear, a resident of Ward 8, and I'm also a candidate for the DC Council at large from the Statehood Green Party.

I know we have a weather issue here, so I'm going to truncate my written testimony just a bit and confine it to the portions dealing with the issue of housing affordability, which is the key area of my testimony. Currently, the eligibility for inclusionary zoning unit determined using area median income, which includes some of the wealthiest surrounding counties in the DC Metro area. This is the definitions of affordability upward, allowing developers to promote what are functionally market-rate units as affordable. Ultimately, the Zoning Commissioners could amend the eligibility requirements during this rewrite in one of two ways to remedy this issue.

The first way would be to amend the criterion by using, instead of average median income, DC median family income as opposed to AMI. So, just as a quick example here, in Fiscal Year 2013, AMI was \$107,300, while the DCMI, DC Median Family Income, was \$87,400. So, if, for example, housing that qualified as affordable was meant to mean income between 30 and 50 percent of whichever one of those metrics we wanted to use, AMI or DMI, we can see that it would be a very drastic difference. Using AMI, the range that would be qualified as affordable would be between \$32,000, roughly \$32,000, and roughly \$53,000. Using DMI, the same range would be between \$26,000 and \$43,000. Now, this is an extremely significant number as a 2010 study that was done by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute showed that, in fact, over two-thirds of people with income that is essentially below \$30,000, or what is 30 percent of AMI, face severe housing burdens, which means they spend over 50 percent of their income on housing costs. And so, shifting the metric you use from area median income to District family median income would significantly impact those people who most need relief in terms of affordable housing. If you didn't want to do it that way, however, there is another way you could change the eligibility requirements that would accomplish something similar, and that would be to define "low- to moderate-income housing" in relationship to the federal minimum wage -- which is currently \$7.25, I believe -- to the current yearly income of someone making exactly the federal minimum wage. Working 40 hours a week is \$15,080. So, if you set the range of affordability for low- to moderate-income housing at between 100 percent and 200 percent of federal minimum wage, it would mean that individuals who made between \$15,000 and \$30,000 a year would be eligible. That's what these, that would be the income standard for those units. So, again, the effect would be to shift down the definition of what is low- and moderate income housing for inclusionary zoning to the elements of the population to the elements of the population who are the most affected by the high cost of housing that exists in the District of Columbia. And the second piece I will say, just to finish up here in regards to the housing piece, is the Commissioners can also revise the square footage percentage that is required for inclusionary zoning. I know that's also front of the Council. But I would urge you to move it from the current to eight- to 10-percent to upwards of 20 percent in terms of that requirement, which will significantly increase the affordable housing stock that exists and that's being created in all new developments. So, again, I thank you so much for allowing me to make this testimony.

The Zoning Re-Write Which Outlines All of DC Zoning Law Will Not Be Made Available In Other Languages. <http://www.dcfedback.com/fit2print/citywide/76>

Additional Resources

http://justicefirst.nationbuilder.com/eugene_testimony_022615

TESTIMONY OF EUGENE PURYEAR, DIRECTOR OF FIELD OPERATIONS Committee on Housing & Community Development Agency Performance Oversight Hearing

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Councilmembers:

My name is Eugene Puryear and I am testifying on behalf of the organization Justice First that, among other things, is working in conjunction with the Alabama Ave./13th St. Tenants Coalition in their effort to prevent their displacement as a result of a planned development at the Congress Heights Metro Station. I open by highlighting this case because it is highly indicative of the problems surrounding the entirely inadequate creation of housing that is affordable to District residents regardless of income.

Some of these issues are “macro” and extend far beyond this hearing.

The tide of gentrification across the District now means that the median rent is more than \$1,400. A family needs to earn \$27 per hour to afford a two-bedroom market-rate apartment. The current minimum wage (\$8.25) is only 30 percent of the needed wage, and even the minimum wage increase coming in 2016 (\$11.50) is only 42 percent of the housing wage. Currently, rent control is limited to buildings built before 1976 – a rapidly shrinking set of units. This lack of real rent control has had serious consequences. Between 2000 and 2010, median rents increased by 50 percent. In the same period, half of all low-cost rental units were lost, while the number of high-cost units tripled. To put this even further in context, the lowest-income 40 percent of D.C. households have seen essentially no change in income. Specifically for renters, the average income has also remained virtually unchanged.

The true meaning of “affordable” housing is very muddled. Affordable housing is determined via relationship to area median income (AMI), which measures not just the District, but many of the wealthy surrounding counties, distorting measures of affordability. The current AMI in the District is \$107,500. Practically, this means even a lot of “affordable” units remain out of reach for those with the greatest need and the most significant burden in housing costs.

In short, we have too few well-paying jobs combined with a market that creates primarily only units aimed towards high-income earners and ultimately the long-term needs of their capital investors, which needless to say are based on their own rate of return and not the housing needs of District residents.

Further, the funds provided for affordable housing are abysmally low. The District has a Housing Production Trust Fund, which has received roughly \$100 million per year (the baseline for appropriate funding according to many housing activists) over the last three years. But historically, this Trust has produced fewer than 1,000 units for families earning under \$32,250

per year, meeting less than 2 percent of the need. That's fewer than 1,000 units for 60,000 families!

There are currently 71,000 people on the public housing waiting list. To house them would cost an estimated \$2.3 billion. \$1.3 billion of that would upgrade our existing public housing stock and ensure our residents in public housing have safe, livable and comfortable accommodations. Currently, however, no substantial sum is being appropriated to upgrade or build public housing units. Instead, the District is continuing efforts to reduce the number of public housing units, and in fact allows hundreds to sit vacant.

With challenges like these DHCD has to husband its money somewhat carefully to get maximum impact. This is why I highlighted the Congress Heights tenants because the situation there absolutely deserves answers from DHCD as to their behavior.

The project includes one building currently not owned by those proposing the current development. Currently, this building has a 40-year covenant requiring all units to be affordable for extremely low-income tenants. And while the current owner of that building received almost \$1 million in a loan from the District government, the building still remains vacant. No money has been repaid on that loan, nor has the owner paid any taxes. Despite the dire need for affordable housing, and the outstanding loan, it is our understanding that the District is preparing to sell the building very cheaply and wave the affordability covenant – essentially allowing anything to be built in its stead, namely the smaller, market-rate units that Sanford Capital is proposing. These units would be unaffordable to the vast majority of Congress Heights residents.

Not only are these facts alone quite distressing, but the parties involved have long-checked histories with the District and its agencies. One partner in this deal is Sanford Capital. Sanford is known very well to DHCD. In another Southeast apartment complex, Terrace Manor, Sanford signed an agreement with a tenants association in exchange for the association's right to purchase the building, then promptly reneged. It has not implemented any of the repairs or improvements promised, has maintained poor conditions, and has evicted half of the building's residents. Sanford has failed to repay a District loan, pleading poverty, while simultaneously trying to sell the building. Sanford has a reputation for this – buying low-income buildings under false pretenses, refusing to maintain them in livable condition, and then trying to sell in order to dodge their obligations and line their pockets. This is classic slumlord behavior. DHCD is trying to force Sanford to sell because of its actions.

So one must ask why on earth would DHCD would even consider facilitating a deal with Sanford Capital, whose recent track record shows their willingness to game District agencies and low-income residents for their own profits? Further, CityPartners, headed by Geoffrey Griffis, is also a party to this deal. Mr. Griffis has his own history of corruption while he was a member of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, enough of a history that this body, the D.C. Council, rejected him when he was proposed as a member of the Zoning Commission. Further, as is outlined in the WAMU series “deals for developers,” Mr. Griffis was a part of a very unsavory deal that transferred millions of dollars' worth of District-owned land for \$1 dollar. On top of all of this, in documents procured through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, one DHCD employee stated to another: “I looked through the coupon book and now I

see what this deal is all about.” The implication there is clear: that cases like these with sweetheart deals for slumlords may not be that rare.

We need serious answers on these questions:

1. Does DHCD consider past history of ethical and legal malfeasance in considering who they work with? If not, why would they knowingly facilitate developments that could harm current and future tenants?
2. What is the current status of 3200 13th St. SE (the building at issue)? Do they plan to waive the previous affordability covenant? Do they plan to forgive all or part of the outstanding loan? What steps are being taken to recoup the District’s investment and sanction the current owner for wasting taxpayer money?
3. What is the “coupon book”?
4. Given the facts regarding the history of the proposed developers and their current abysmal treatment of current tenants, will they reconsider any involvement with the current Planned Unit Development?
- 5.

I want to end by restating the point made at the beginning of this testimony: There is not even close to enough money appropriated to house all those who need housing. In Justice First, we believe housing is a human right, not a privilege. This committee needs to use its oversight powers to suss out the key obstacles to an aggressive plan — in the billions of dollars — to put a roof over everyone’s head. Literally billions are given out each year in tax breaks as advocacy group ONE DC points out; however, in the past 10 years, the District gave \$1.7 billion to developers, and this amount could have housed every family making less than \$32,250 (30 percent of area median income) — 60,000 families — for more than two years. This quite frankly is just the tip of the iceberg for misused public funds, like \$100 million for a soccer stadium.

While developers get free money from the District, tenants — like those at Congress Heights — get abused, neglected and displaced. This is a sign that the entire system we have created to allegedly provide affordable housing is entirely broken.

Thank you,
Eugene Puryear

DC's Failed New Communities Initiative

Recommendation: Fulfill promises to communities as to the number of affordable units, provide hefty fines for non-compliance.

<http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/citydesk/2014/10/29/how-d-c-s-plan-to-save-low-income-housing-went-wrong/>

Another Helpful Analysis

http://www.washlaw.org/pdf/wlc_affordable_housing_report.PDF

In Defense of Public Housing

Imagine a future in which many of us live in, and thrive in, quality public housing.

by Karen Narefsky 11.28.15

Karen Narefsky is a community organizer based in Somerville, MA and a contributing editor at *Jacobin*.



The playground at St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe housing complex. Michael Allen / Flickr

This article was adapted from a talk given by the author at [Grasping At the Root](#). It originally appeared in *Dissent*.

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hen people on the Left think about solutions to the housing crisis, few of us think about public housing. Faced with the twin problems of overinvestment, leading to gentrification and displacement, and underinvestment, leading to substandard housing and foreclosures, we tend to think about locally based solutions, which makes sense. Many of these problems are caused by the state in collusion with the real estate industry, and it seems impossible to imagine a future in which the government plays a different role. But I'd like to imagine a future in which many of us live in, and thrive in, public housing.

Any discussion of the future of public housing must begin by understanding its origins. Public housing in the United States first emerged in the 1930s as part of the New Deal, when there was an enormous shortage of housing following the Great Depression. The federal government began by making loans to nonprofit corporations to build housing. This program produced very few housing units, due both to the lack of qualified builders and to the inefficiency of channeling public funds through the limited-dividend corporations.

As a result, under the Public Works Administration, led by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, the government decided to enter the housing business: rather than paying companies to build government-subsidized housing, the state would build and maintain housing through local housing authorities.

As soldiers returned from World War II, their expanding families created a boom in demand for housing, both private and public. The vast public housing programs undertaken in the postwar period, however, suffered from the racism and disinvestment that would become endemic to government housing, and to nearly every other public institution through the present day.

Like other provisions of the G.I. Bill, public housing location and construction were left in the hands of local officials all too eager to keep African Americans out of their communities. Meanwhile, families with resources were encouraged by low-interest mortgage loans to leave urban public housing and move to the suburbs. Of the 67,000 mortgages issued under the G.I. Bill, fewer than 100 were taken out by black veterans.

In its relatively short history, public housing has suffered from rampant corruption in some cities, and from the failure of many local housing authorities to maintain and repair housing projects. But this doesn't mean public housing is a flawed concept, just as "underperforming" public schools whose students are burdened by poverty don't serve as proof that public education is a failed endeavor. Public disinvestment is the first step in a now-familiar playbook that leads to privatization.

Since the 1970s, privately-funded affordable housing has largely supplanted government-funded public housing. HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) programs like Hope VI and Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) exemplify this increasing reliance on the private market.

Many of the units in RAD housing or affordable housing built by community development corporations are paid for with Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), with higher income limits than traditional public housing. These higher income limits, along with the overall need for more affordable housing units, pushes many struggling households into overcrowding, homelessness, and public housing waitlists.

In line with this shift toward private ownership of subsidized housing, US public housing authorities have become increasingly reliant on Housing Choice Vouchers, or Section 8. While possession of a mobile Section 8 voucher guarantees subsidized rent, the units where the voucher can be used are privately owned.

This allows landlords to discriminate against tenants, whether through outright exclusion or by charging rents that exceed HUD's fair market cap. Section 8 tenants can easily be forced out by property value increases and rising rents, one facet of the cycle of gentrification and displacement currently affecting many US cities.

In a process partially justified by these many challenges, public housing is currently either being killed by neglect or aggressively privatized. Take Chicago's "Plan for Transformation" — a scheme to demolish the city's public housing projects and rebuild them as "mixed-income" developments.

Economically diverse neighborhoods are a laudable goal. But most of the mixed-income developments built under Mayors Richard Daley and Rahm Emanuel are segregated by class, with low-income residents subject to increased surveillance and discrimination. Those who were allowed to return — that is, thousands of the public housing residents who were displaced by the Plan for Transformation — do not have a place available for them in the new developments.

The vision of public housing I want to put forward requires a major shift in the way that we think about the role of government and the public sector. The role of the state is to provide fundamental services and goods to the people without concern for profit. One of those must be safe, quality affordable housing.

Currently, speculative pressures on land deny the right of housing to those unable to pay exorbitant costs. If you own land, you can raise the price of it as much as the overheated market will bear. If you don't own land and can't afford the rent, then you are shut out of housing altogether.

What is to be done? Take land off the speculative market, build housing on it, and keep it permanently affordable for anyone who might want to live there. This is being done or attempted in many cities by the community land trust movement, which puts forward a vision of community-controlled affordable housing. I wholeheartedly support that vision. I also imagine a future in which the government, instead of capitulating to the demands of real estate developers, assumes the responsibility of providing shelter itself.

The public housing I envision would not be the public housing most of us know. It would be resident-controlled, with democratically elected tenant leaders who make decisions about programming and problem-solving along with government workers.

It would be available to residents of all incomes, so as to avoid the stigma that comes with means-tested programs. It would be well-designed and attractive, designed through architecture competitions like many public housing developments in Europe. And its maintenance — not just its construction — would be fully and adequately subsidized by the state.

For any of this to work, it would have to be built at a large scale, beyond that at which local community land trusts can operate. But I hope that the community land trust movement can provide an example of the kind of housing we need.

Vienna, Austria, where nearly half of all residents live in government-subsidized housing, provides another instructive example. The prevalence of public housing imposes de facto rent controls on private landlords, who cannot raise rents far beyond what the government charges if they want to attract tenants. Public housing complexes include childcare programming, community centers, swimming pools, and other facilities.

While US public housing is constantly threatened by cuts in federal funding, the entire HUD budget amounts to just over half of the revenue lost annually on mortgage-interest tax deductions for disproportionately wealthy homeowners. In addition to reducing the mortgage-interest deduction, large-scale public housing could be indirectly subsidized by a redistributive tax policy, full employment, or a universal basic income, so that all tenants could afford their rent.

Conceiving of community-controlled public housing as the norm amounts to what Kathi Weeks terms a “utopian demand” — one that, while it may not be immediately winnable, causes us to think differently about the future we want. Housing justice groups across the country, as part of

the Right to the City Alliance, are asserting the right to preserve, reclaim, and rebuild working-class communities. Let's demand that they are rebuilt as a public good.

<http://www.parksandrecreation.org/2014/August/Green-Justice-The-Promise-for-Equity-in-Our-Parks/>

Green Justice: The Promise for Equity in Our Parks

2014-08-01, Feature, by Gina Mullins-Cohen



I recently sat down with renowned civil rights attorney and founding director and counsel of The City Project, Robert Garcia, and over the course of several hours, I got a glimpse into the mind and personality of a compelling individual, a man who has taken up the fight for civil rights and what he calls “green justice” in Los Angeles and in communities beyond the city boundaries.

Garcia has fought countless difficult battles for social justice throughout his career. He helped free Geronimo Ji Jaga Pratt, the former Black Panther leader, from prison after 27 years for a crime he did not commit. He litigated international banking cases against Iran. He represented people convicted of capital crimes on death row in Mississippi, Florida and Georgia. He also prosecuted organized crime, public corruption and international narcotics trafficking cases, all while serving as an assistant United States attorney for the Southern District of New York under John Martin and Rudolph W. Giuliani — and this is just the short list.

When asked about the most challenging struggle of his career, however, Garcia readily admits that fighting for the rights of children of color and children who are poor to have the simple joys of playing in a park or a schoolyard is among the hardest work he has ever done. This interview speaks to his fight and how he has remained steadfast, never wavering from the truth of the mission before him. You can hear more in person when Garcia speaks as a keynote panelist at the 2014 NRPA Congress Opening General Session Tuesday, October 14, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Gina Mullins-Cohen: Your organization, The City Project, brought the topic of social equity in regards to parks and open green space front and center in the eyes of the public and elected officials. Tell us about the mission of The City Project and why it was founded.

Robert Garcia: The City Project was founded in 2000, and it was it founded for the very simple reason to work in the area of equality in relation to green space...the effort to focus on the lack of green space available to children of color and low-income families needed to be done. No one else was doing it, but the truth is no one else would do it.

I am a civil rights attorney. Bringing my experience to this cause, as well as the experience and effort of other civil rights attorneys, is essential, and it distinguishes The City Project from other programs. We bring the necessary legal tools to this critical conversation, and this allows us to go after alternative ways to seek social change through law, without resorting to litigation as the first means or as the only means. We are able to pull many successful strategies from the civil rights movement including the translation of research, policy and law into very real changes in people's lives. We organize coalitions. We create strategic media campaigns. We do policy and legal advocacy outside the courts, and we provide access to justice through the courts.

Mullins-Cohen: What specific areas do you cover in your work with The City Project?

Garcia: There are five areas around which we center our work with The City Project:

- Equal access to parks and recreation
- Quality education with an emphasis on physical education
- Health disparities from lack of physical activity and healthy eating
- Economic vitality — local green jobs
- Smart growth with equitable development.

Mullins-Cohen: A few months ago, I visited Los Angeles State Historic Park for the first time. What obstacles did you face and do you continue to face in helping to take this park to a completed stage?

Garcia: The advancement and development of Los Angeles State Historic Park was slow. In 2010, officials were forced to scale down plans for the park. This was due to the California state budget deficit. So instead of the planned \$55 million, the park got \$18 million.

Mullins-Cohen: Tell me about the history of the site. I read that Los Angeles State Historic Park was the former site of Southern Pacific Transportation Company's river station. It was considered the Ellis Island of Los Angeles. This is where people arriving from the East first stepped out into the city.

Garcia: Yes, the park is where major racial and ethnic groups first arrived. This includes the Tongva or Gabrieleños, Spanish soldiers and missionaries who were diverse Pobladores who settled El Pueblo; Chinese who settled in Old Chinatown; Japanese in Little Tokyo; and African Americans who settled in Bronzeville. The park reflects the past, present and future of the most diverse city in the nation.

The site could have been warehouses, but it is not. The park was born from a brownfield — a term used for land designated as or used as an industrial site. Andrew Cuomo, who was secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at that time, withheld federal funding for a proposed warehouse project at this same site unless there was a full environmental review that considered the park alternative and the impact on people who are of color or of low income. Secretary Cuomo cited Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the President’s Order 12898 on environmental justice and health, which protects equal access to public resources including parks. HUD acted in response to an administrative complaint filed by diverse allies.

But what is key to this park is that it is not here because of the vision of politicians, or some design or plan. The park is here because of the struggle and agitation by the community. Deservedly, their action is renowned as one of the most significant environmental justice victories in Los Angeles, and it is their action that is the catalyst for the revitalization of the Los Angeles River.

Mullins-Cohen: Did advocacy for the Los Angeles Historical State Park help launch The City Project?

Garcia: Yes, it was the flagship project. The park was inspiration to keep going. Since then, working with the park agencies, we have developed Los Angeles River Park [and] Ascot Hills Park, which is over 132 acres and the largest green space in East Los Angeles. We have also developed Baldwin Hills Park, which is in an African-American community. One-third of Baldwin Hills Park is in reality transforming oil fields into parks.

Mullins-Cohen: 2014 marks several anniversaries in regards to social justice. We have the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty...

Garcia: And don’t forget the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education or Hernandez v. Texas where equal justice protects people based on race, color or national origin. It is also the 20th anniversary of the Environmental Justice Order. The final phase of construction for Los Angeles Historic Park begins in 2014, and this is fitting because Los Angeles Historic Park is acknowledged as one of the milestones in the environmental justice movement.

Mullins-Cohen: You have coined the term “green justice.” How would you define this?

Garcia: Green justice is equitable development, healthy use of green land, and planning by and for the community.

Mullins-Cohen: Who has adopted green justice? Have the efforts globalized?

Garcia: Yes. It has become globalized — very much so. The Healthy Parks Healthy People (HPHP) program, adopted by the National Park Service (NPS), was launched in Australia and has attracted other park agencies globally. Agencies in Australia, New Zealand, UK and Canada are working in the program. Now the NPS has the Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Action Plan, as well as the HPHP Science Plan. They are also in the process of creating a community resource guide — all of these are done at the policy level.

Mullins-Cohen: Are you working with the National Park Service on any specific projects?

Garcia: Yes, we are. Recently, Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA) published a discussion draft of legislation to designate the San Gabriel Mountains and river corridor as a national recreation area. The proposed national recreation area would serve 17 million people within an hour’s

drive of the mountains. The San Gabriel Mountains provide over 70 percent of Los Angeles County's open space. According to Representative Chu, these mountains provide outdoor spaces to promote public health and environmental justice in one of the most park-poor regions in the United States.

A lack of recreational opportunities has severe impacts on urban populations struggling with obesity, diabetes, heart disease and chronic illness. Parks in nearby urban areas lack the resources to adequately provide opportunities for residents to walk, jog, bike, picnic or enjoy the outdoors. The national recreation area will promote economic value and resources.

The concept of the national recreation area is to recognize the opportunities of city resources and parks. These will be national parks for the 21st century.

Mullins-Cohen: If the area is designated as a national recreation area, will development in nearby communities result in gentrification?

Garcia: Numerous studies have shown that recreational areas and open green spaces increase property value and revenues for local businesses. Gentrification is a real problem. Take the revitalization of the Los Angeles River — there is a risk that the people there now will be pushed out as the area becomes more attractive for development. Rent for housing and businesses can go up. That area of Los Angeles has been branded an industrial wasteland, so people have historically lived there simply because they could afford it. Gentrification is a land-grab, and that is a problem. Kevin Starr, the Los Angeles historian, once said “You cannot have a city with only rich people. You need the teachers, policemen and the firefighters.”

Currently we are working with experts to come up with recommendations to keep people in their jobs and help them become homeowners. If we cannot do this, the risk is turning these culturally rich areas of Los Angeles into San Francisco — a city with very little diversity.

Mullins-Cohen: Why is progress in regards to social equity in our parks so difficult to realize?

Garcia: We have been fighting for equality since before the Civil War. The work we do is part of the process in forming a more perfect Union. Fighting for parks for poor children is hard. Nobody cares. We represent the people who need what they are entitled to receive. They have the voice, but we can help to get the politicians to listen.

If you can afford it, you live in the parts of Los Angeles where there is green space or you simply travel to it. Did you know that one of the biggest green spaces in East Los Angeles is a cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery? Think about the message this sends to the children in East Los Angeles...if they want to experience green space, they have to die.

This struggle never ends.

Robert Garcia, will be a keynote speaker at [NRPA Congress](#) October 14, 2014.

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