



Housing Justice League Newsletter

October 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Thursday Oct 20, 10:00 am to 12:00pm- Redlight the Gulch Town Hall New New Calvary Missionary Baptist Church. 1690 Melrose Dr SW. Join us to learn about the changes that have been made to the Gulch Plan due to widespread criticism, and why we still believe this is one of the worst development projects ever proposed. Coffee and refreshments will be provided, and after a briefing on the changes, we hope to hit the streets and canvass to educate our fellow residents about how the Gulch deal will harm our cities, schools, infrastructures, and do devastating damage to the affordable housing market in Atlanta.

Thursday Nov 8, 6:30 pm - Tenant Organizing Training 1040 Crew St SW Atlanta 30315. How to start a tenant association, protect tenant rights to quality, affordable housing, and build power to stop displacement! Please email housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com for location and to RSVP!

Tuesday Nov 20, 7:00 pm, 6:30 orientation 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.



REDLIGHT THE GULCH

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE JOINS OTHER COMMUNITY ADVOCATES TO PUSH BACK AGAINST THE GULCH REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

The past few weeks have been a whirlwind, as the City of Atlanta races to ram the Gulch redevelopment plan through with minimal community input. If finalized, it would add to the legacy of disastrous public-private mega developments displacing countless longtime Atlanta residents en masse. The proposed deal, brokered between the City of Atlanta and the Los Angeles-based billionaire developer CIM, would convert 12 to 15 city blocks of the downtown Gulch to office, residential, retail, and entertainment space, all of which would be privately owned by CIM. When the public is putting in as much as 40 percent of the cost to develop a private, commercial project, it should go without saying that the public deserves far more than zero percent of ownership. Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and her administration have been using their “Green Light the Gulch” campaign to astroturf the issue, touting the “benefits” of the plan in an effort to deceive the public into supporting what amounts to highway robbery.

About half of total development costs are expected to come from public funding, via a subsidy worth upwards of \$2.5 billion. To generate this sum, proponents of the project have proposed the use of a tax allocation district (TAD), which is a zone where 5 cents of the city’s 8.9-cent sales tax, along with anticipated increases in property taxes from the development itself, are used to backup the bonds that pay for

the project. In effect, a TAD is a way to channel the energy of gentrification into funding for redevelopment, creating a vicious cycle that only serves to reinforce or exacerbate preexisting conditions of housing inequity. The BeltLine development project is one clear example of the danger TADS pose to the long-term social, political, economic, and cultural well-being of low-income communities of color. Yet despite the considerable amount of public tax dollars that would be involuntarily contributed towards the project, the public has yet to receive meaningful opportunities to offer their input. This lack of communication, while not a death knell, foreshadows negligible *community* benefits for public, tax paying citizens, local residents, etc.

THE PUBLIC STANDS TO LOSE 55 TIMES MORE THAN IT WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE GULCH DEVELOPMENT.



With this particular plan, the public would pay nearly half of the \$5 billion investment, yet would hold no ownership. We would lose \$2.5 billion in taxes and only receive 1.8% of that in return as benefits; in other words, the public cost of the Gulch plan far outweighs the public benefit, at least in terms of raw numbers. Such a plan would incur significant consequences for schools and infrastructure and strike a major blow against affordable housing. The City claims they will build 200 affordable housing units, but those units will be priced at 80% AMI (Area Median Income), and CMI has the option to sell those properties after just three years at 120% AMI, which would be financially untenable for current residents. Plus, the value of the affordable housing units won't come close to matching the taxpayer contribution. Plus, the revenue from retail sales and new development that might occur in other neighborhoods will still be diverted to the Gulch, due to the combination of a sales tax incentive and the unending stream of cash from TAD.

Due to all the issues with the proposal and public outrage, Mayor Bottoms has been hitting some road blocks on her Greenlight the Gulch campaign trail. Last month, she delayed a vote on the deal because of a lack of support from City Council. Eight City Council members sponsored legislation seeking an outside audit of the proposal, which would have slowed the process, but could not get the required votes for its implementation. Furthermore, passing the Gulch deal requires approval from Atlanta Public Schools. APS' superintendent, Meria Carstarphen, is saying she wants to renegotiate or eliminate APS' participation in other TADs before signing onto the Gulch deal, because she feels greater investment in development projects diverts necessary funds

from services for families and taxpayers. Estimates suggest that property tax on a \$5 billion project completed in 2032 would come out to around \$90 million per year, and APS would be losing out on \$45 million per year, while the City and County would each lose \$22.5 million



Housing Justice League and other community advocates are using a host of creative and noisy approaches to increase public awareness and push back against this undemocratic attack. We have held multiple canvassing days and shown up in force at City meetings, including Mayor Bottoms' public meeting on September 26, during which the Mayor and CIM's spokespeople presented the Gulch Development plan in an attempt to sell it to the audience. At the outset of this meeting, the audience was asked to remain "objective" and "open-minded" and refrain from "side conversations" or disruption. We also worked with GA Stand Up and Senator Vincent Fort to organize our own "Redlight the Gulch Town Hall" campaign as a response to the Mayor's "community engagement" approach and an affirmation of the community's historical perspective.

As Alison Johnson, a resident of Peopletown

and member of Housing Justice League's board, put it at a Town Hall organized by HJL, "We've seen what happened to public housing before the 1996 Olympics, we've seen what happened at Atlantic Station, we've seen what happened with the redevelopment of Turner Field, and now we see what is happening along the BeltLine. All of these infrastructures are just a methodology of mass displacement, particularly for disenfranchised African American communities in the City of Atlanta." These projects continue to be designed behind closed doors by "experts" with no community input, resulting in further perpetuation of a violent system. In fact, City Councilman Amir Farokhi, (Old Fourth Ward), noted at a recent meeting that even the council members are "still waiting to see the entirety of the proposed deal. We haven't seen all the details."

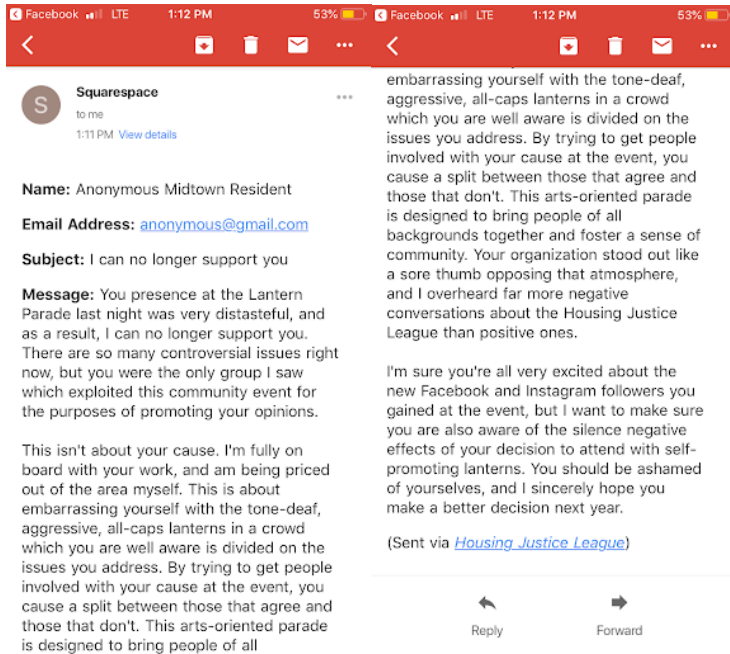
We refuse to stand idly by and allow the continued extraction of resources from the community. We must continue to take a stand against these attempts to rob us of our right to decide what should happen with our land and to our communities. If we want to live in a city that is equitable for all, then we must have responsible, transparent and accountable development practices that allow people from across the spectrum of Atlanta to weigh in on decisions. So we could take Mayor Bottoms' word that this development will come at no cost to taxpayers and without incurring consequences for longtime residents through displacement... or we can look at the clear precedent that has already been set to see what happens when decisions are made by corporate developers, rather than the residents who actually understand, inhabit and sustain the communities.

BELTLINE FOR ALL UPDATE: LANTERN PARADE AND QUARTERLY MEETING



This past month, we've been amping up our Beltline For All campaign with multiple public events, including walking in the Lantern Parade and having a presence at the BeltLine Quarterly meeting. The Lantern Parade, which takes place along the Beltline, runs from Krog Street Market to Piedmont Park and attracts over 70,000 people every year. HJL wanted to match the creativity and ingenuity of the lantern parade while also leaving no doubt about our message to the community. So folks from the campaign came together to create housing justice themed lanterns and painted important messages on them, including "Development Without Displacement" and "We Demand Affordable Housing." Finding our spot near the middle of the parade, we attracted a lot of attention and were able to generate some conversation around this issue. Several cheered us on or approached us to learn more about our organization, and we heard some people talking to their children or each other about what "Housing Is A Human Right" really means. Sometimes, though, our display was met with silence or other more ambiguous commentary, such as a few people

saying they weren't sure housing was a human right. Reactions like these, as well as the below anonymous email, serve as a reminder that our presence at the parade was absolutely necessary.



WE RESPONDED WITH THE FOLLOWING:

As we walked through the lantern parade, we heard far more cheers than negative responses, people talking to their children about the concept of affordable housing in teachable moments, and people asking us how to get involved. Of course we got some hecklers and of course we made some people uncomfortable because they were, after all, standing on the foundation that is causing a lot of the division and displacement of people around Atlanta, i.e. the BeltLine. I'm surprised that our presence at the lantern parade is more divisive to you than the actual displacement of Atlanta's long-time residents. The sheer emergency of the issue of affordable housing should be far more appalling. The people on the BeltLine who come from "different walks of life" are also *very* differently affected by the BeltLine. Did some people want to forget that for

one night in a performative act of "community"? Yes I'm sure they did. We all want a break from the fast moving pace of gentrification in Atlanta. But it's not stopping. Although the lantern parade is very fun, enjoyable, and has a positive atmosphere, the same people who are made uncomfortable by our presence are the people who wish to remain willfully ignorant that the person standing beside them cannot access and use this BeltLine in the same way that they can.

Further, how far does this community really go? I don't want to assume you and others would be using this same kind of respectability politics on other people at the parade who are "from a different background," but especially when you feel the need to tone police our messages, it makes me think that you might. Which is exactly why it isn't an all-inclusive environment for everyone. You can see that just by taking a walk on the BeltLine. Mostly, what I understood is that the organizers were very supportive of us as soon as we got into line and people were cheering because essentially we were saying what needs to be said. Asking for likes was not part of the original plan but some volunteers went with it in an effort to get people involved. There were numerous people asking who we were and how to contact us. As with most serious human rights issues, there are those who fall off the bandwagon when it is time to get serious about who the issue is really hurting. I urge you to reconsider what it means to be angered and uncomfortable by the presence of an important and relevant message.

HJL MAKES ITS PRESENCE KNOWN AT THE BELTLINE QUARTERLY MEETING

The BeltLine Quarterly meeting is an important opportunity for us to remind key players in the BeltLine of our demand for development without displacement. The meeting happens every three months and is a time for the Atlanta BeltLine Inc (ABI) to give updates on various aspects of the project to the public and respond to public comment. This time, the meeting was held at Park Tavern and included multiple presentations by ABI and City employees on plans to continue development. We see these meetings as an opportunity to engage with the various entities involved in the development of the BeltLine and to hold them accountable to their promises.



A strong group of about 15 Beltline for All supporters had a notable influence at the meeting. We all wore bright red Beltline4All stickers to make our presence visible. Some people collected signatures for the Beltline for All petition drive outside as people walked into the meeting. This was one strategy of educating people at the meeting, and sharing another side of the story that ABI refuses to acknowledge. We also placed informational flyers titled "How Can We Use This Bike Path If We Can't Afford to Live By It?" on every chair before the meeting began. The flyers addressed the affordable housing needs along the BeltLine and the rapid gentrification the project has caused. This was another way of setting the tone for the evening and

ensuring audience members heard our message..

Additionally, many Beltline for All advocates spoke during public comment. Many of us asked crucial questions like "How do you define 'affordable' housing? How will people who are within 0-30% AMI afford your housing which is priced at 80% AMI?" and "How will you make sure that the displacement and gentrification that happened where the BeltLine development started in the Old Fourth Ward doesn't happen in the neighborhoods where the BeltLine is expanding to?" ABI and city employees responded by skirting around the issue. Many stated that they are prioritizing affordable housing, but until we see substantive tangible action,, we will continue to apply pressure and hold them accountable .

So far, ABI has failed to meet their goals and the Beltline development has caused a massive loss of affordable housing stock. The City promised 5,600 new units of affordable housing with the BeltLine development, but halfway through its completion, ABI's Housing Working Group claims it has produced 2,642 units. Yet, less than 1,000 of those units have actually been supported by ABI. Most of those counted are affordable housing units that already existed, or were supported by other agencies and simply happen to be within the BeltLine TAD/Planning Area. Plus, Atlanta lost 5,309 low cost rental units between 2010 and 2014. So even if the City did follow through with their promise, it would not be enough: the BeltLine Affordable Housing Study estimates a demand for 10,400 affordable housing units in the Atlanta BeltLine area over the coming decade. Sending our message at Quarterly meetings is one way we will continue to apply pressure to shift the future of BeltLine construction. Look out for the next Quarterly meeting in a few months and come join us!