



Southside Together Organizing for Power

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The Low-Down STOP's Quarterly Newsletter

No. 1, February 2007

Tenants tell HUD: End Mismanagement + Displacement and Support Tenant Control

On December 11th, 2006, 100 tenants marched on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s Chicago headquarters to demand an end to corruption, deteriorating conditions and the displacement of poor people and people color out of Chicago. The protest was organized by STOP and the Coalition to Protect Public Housing (CPPH), who have formed the N.E. Illinois Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign. 8 tenant councils representing over 2000 households forced negotiations with Midwest HUD Director Joseph Galvan on January 11th, where they proposed solutions such as tenant self-management and got commitments to address the issues facing public and subsidized housing tenants in Chicago. (...continued on page 2...)



Tenants take on HUD corruption, December 11th, 2006

WHAT IS STOP?

Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) is an organization that works to build the capacity and power of low-income residents to impact the decisions and forces that affect their lives. We were founded in 2003 in Woodlawn by people concerned that low-income black people are being pushed out of the community. We organize around many issues and specialize in the struggles of public- and subsidized-housing tenants to create Tenants' Associations, improve the conditions of their homes, and keep from being pushed out of the community.

STOP members include:

- The Grove Parc Tenants Association
- The Kimbark Tenants Association
- People Of Woodlawn (POW)
- The Southside Solidarity Network
- The Washington Scene Tenants Association

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Tenants Demand Accountability from HUD

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Tenants are demanding that HUD:

- Stop giving contracts to slumlords
- Train and fund tenants for self-management
- Eliminate hazardous conditions
- Ask owners to disclose budgets to tenants
- Stop the demolition of public housing.

“We showed HUD we mean business. Mr. Galvan shouldn't worry about the bus we brought down, he should worry about the next time, when there will be buses if our issues aren't resolved,” says Carol Steele, co-

founder of CPPH.

Among other things, tenants made Mr. Galvan commit to personally visit all properties with tenant council representatives,

ask all owners to

turn over their operating budgets to tenants, and resolve all dangerous and hazardous conditions within 30 days. “People always say that poor black people can't come together but this was a display of power and we didn't need our so-called leaders to come out and advocate for us, we did this for ourselves,” says Ebonee Stevenson, Organizing Director of STOP and leader of the Kimbark Tenants Association. “What I think is working is our unity. We're getting' smart in the hood. This man was learning from us, he don't really know what's happening from behind that big desk of his,” says Stephanie Campbell of the Grove Parc Tenants Association.

The struggle against corruption, mis-management, and displacement of poor people and people of color and for the solution of tenant self-management continues. “We said to HUD, if nothing happens here we plan on taking this all the the way to Washington,” said Mr. Richardson.



Deidre Brewster of CPPH & Brenda Blanks of STOP deliver demands to HUD

Tenants and Nurses Join Together to Fight Clinic Closures and Service Cuts

Cook County Board President Todd Stroger recently announced a budget threatening to cut vital health care services for Chicago's south side. Stroger's proposal would close the Woodlawn Clinic and 17 other clinics as well as eliminating important services at Provident Hospital.

Many STOP members use these services regularly and know the importance of accessible community health care. STOP joined with the National Nurses Organizing Committee and dozens of other community organizations to fight back against devastating service cuts.

STOP members joined nurses for protests at Stroger Hospital, Provident Hospital, in front of Daley Plaza, and at Todd Stroger's downtown and ward offices. They also blitzed commissioners with phone calls and paid visits to numerous commissioners,

At the Provident rally, STOP board president and Woodlawn tenant Sharyn Payne told the hundreds of protesters, “We have to understand, closing poor people's services is another way to push out the poor!” The unity is beginning to bear fruit, with 13 commissioners

recently announcing support for an amendment to the budget to eliminate all cuts to front-line services.



STOP members at Provident Hospital, 1/24/07

Grove Parc Tenants fight to stay in the community and improve their housing

With housing prices skyrocketing, the number of places that low-income and working class families can afford is shrinking by the day. Subsidized complexes like Grove Parc Plaza Apartments hold rents to 30% of a tenant's income, helping families to get by when times are tough. With 504 units, Grove Parc is the third-largest subsidized housing complex in the entire state of Illinois. If Grove Parc goes down, not only will Chicago lose irreplaceable and much-needed housing subsidies, but Woodlawn's home-owners could be displaced next, as property taxes shoot up and condos pop up everywhere.

Due to poor management by the Habitat Company and the Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Company (WPIC), HUD is threatening to foreclose on the property and remove the residents. Unless the owner or tenants can come up with a plan that would ensure that Grove Parc



Getting Organized: A Grove Parc Tenants Association meeting

becomes safe, decent, and well-maintained housing like it was when it was first built, this community resource may be destroyed, forcing long-time community residents out of the community, and threatening many families with homelessness.

But the Grove Parc Tenants Association, led by a 14-tenant Leadership Team, is proving that there is still hope. Tenant leaders are meeting with lawyers, architects, and politicians to create and gain support for a plan that would save and rehabilitate the complex. Already, they have built a tenants association representing over half of the complex and forced meetings with decision-makers at HUD, WPIC, and the University of Chicago (which has two members on WPIC's board). The Grove Parc Leadership Team believes they can make Grove Parc into a place that offers good living conditions, job opportunities, human services for young and old, and a close-knit community.

Leadership team member and STOP organizer Lonnie Richardson says, "We're doing things



Taking Action: Grove Parc Tenants and allies talk to the press at City hall

for ourselves, raising our own voices. At complexes like Grove Parc management does anything they want to if people let it happen. Protesting and coming together like this to demand a seat at the table, they don't think we can do this, they think the low-income are tearing it down, they don't ever see the positive side of the community. But we are taking our power back."

The Grove Parc Leadership Team meets at the STOP office Wednesday evenings at 6pm. The full Grove Parc Tenants Association meets monthly, call 773-753-9674 for information.



Kimbark Tenants Association Update:
Lots of work ahead for 2007

In 2005, the Kimbark Tenants Association (KTA) stopped The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) from illegally kicking 100 families out for a condo conversion and then forced HUD to step in so that management would make repairs. With the section 8 contract expiring in 2009, however, tenants are busy preparing to use the Federally Subsidized Housing Preservation Act (FSHPA), which gives them the first right to buy the buildings or to partner with a non-profit developer to keep the buildings subsidized.

On February 7, 2007 KTA leaders met with Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) organizers who successfully used the FSHPA to preserve subsidies at a 100 unit complex named Lorrington. Tenants stopped displacement and the non-profit developer will be closing the deal late February of this year. KTA was also joined at the meeting by representatives from the Lake Park East Tenants Association, which represents nearly 100 families in 3 subsidized buildings whose contract expires in 2008. Both tenants associations are following up on the meeting by outreaching to all potential players who may offer support in the fight to preserve their buildings, including: elected officials, the city, schools, businesses, churches, and others. They are also researching non-profit developers and educating other tenants about using the law to stop displacement.

Washington Scene tenants organize & win repairs.
Broken elevators continue to endanger tenants

On International Housing Rights day, Oct. 2, tenants from Washington Scene Tenants Association were joined by other STOP members and allies from around the city for a protest at East Lake Management's Michigan Avenue headquarters. Fed up with leaky windows, unfinished hallways and broken elevators, tenants decided that three months of unanswered demands meant it was time to make themselves heard.

"The march on East Lake showed them that we're not playing and that we mean business," said tenant Brenda Blanks. East Lake owner Elzie Higginbottom showed up at the next tenant meeting and committed to address many of the tenants concerns. He replaced the security company, is replacing all the windows and most cabinets and is finishing the hallways. The tenants' most important demand, however, has not been met: replacing elevators that break several times a week and have caused multiple injuries. Already one woman fell seven floors, another had a heart condition aggravated by having to walk down nine flights of stairs, and a pregnant woman was struck in the back of the head.

East Lake promised to order an "independent" elevator inspection but tenants know first hand that the elevators need to be replaced and are bringing the issue directly to HUD before someone else gets hurt.

SUPPORT THE STRUGGLE - DONATE TO STOP!

If you believe in the work STOP does - organizing for racial and economic justice - please support us! Tax-deductible donations can be made out to our fiscal sponsor, the Illinois Justice Foundation and sent or brought to 813 E. 63rd St. Chicago, IL 60637.