



Southside Together Organizing for Power

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The Low-Down STOP's Quarterly Newsletter

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Grove Parc Tenants Fight to Stop Displacement + Racially Exclusive Planning

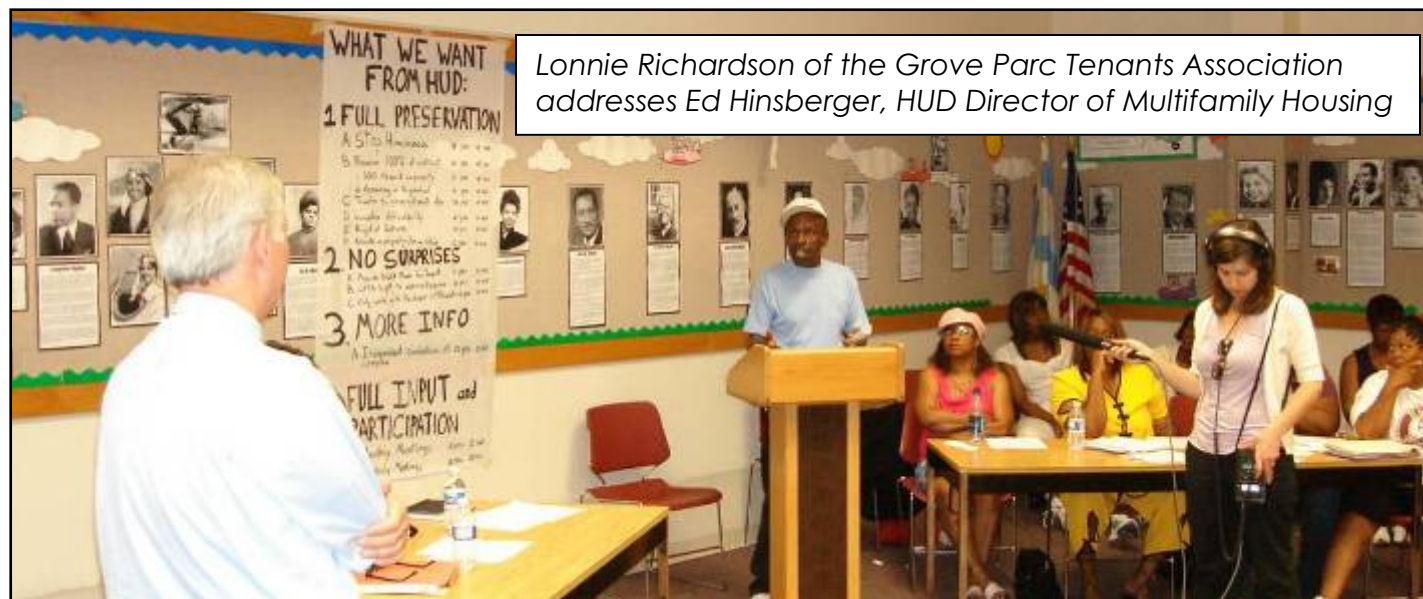


504 low-income black families currently living at Grove Parc Plaza Apartments could soon be on the streets and off of the valuable land blocks away from the University of Chicago that they call home. But not if the Grove Parc Tenants Association has anything to do with it. Marches and press conferences at the complex and at HUD and City Hall won meetings with Department of Housing (DOH) and HUD. DOH Commissioner Jack

Markowski committed \$20 million towards preserving the complex's subsidies. Then, at their June 13th tenant meeting U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Director of Multifamily Housing Ed Hinsberger answered to tenants directly. Mr. Hinsberger acknowledged that years of mismanagement were responsible for the deterioration of this subsidized complex, which is the third largest in Illinois. He explained that HUD is "taking control of the complex by starting down the road to foreclosure" because of two failed inspections in 2006 and inadequate redevelopment proposals by the owners. The Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corporation (WPIC, two of whose board members are from the U of C) and the Davis Group, had submitted redevelopment plans created without tenant input, which proposed to demolish the complex and rebuild only 150 one-bedroom and studio... (continued p. 2)

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Lonnie Richardson of the Grove Parc Tenants Association addresses Ed Hinsberger, HUD Director of Multifamily Housing

Fighting Back at Grove Parc (Cont'd)

apartments. Having rejected those plans, HUD is now weighing its options. It can leave the tenants looking for their own housing with section 8 vouchers that are hard to qualify for, hard to use, and easy to lose. Alternatively, HUD could listen to the Grove Parc Tenants Association's plan to have tenant-chosen ownership and management that works with the tenants association to improve the complex. Mr. Hinsberger committed to meet once a month as the decision is made and acknowledged that he is legally bound to consider the Tenants Association's input.

If tenants are displaced the picture is bleak. Many tenants will not receive section 8 vouchers because you have to have good enough credit to have light and gas bills put in your own name and nobody on your lease can have a criminal record. The experiences of displaced public housing residents show that even many of those who do qualify for vouchers will end up homeless, often through no fault of their own. Vouchers can't be used in Chicago on apartments near too many empty lots or abandoned buildings and cannot go unused for 180 days or they will be taken away. If the landlord fails inspections, the tenant is punished and has to search for a new place. Vouchers are a way to detach subsidies from the land and take away the land currently occupied by a community of 504 black families in the midst of a sea of condos in the rapidly-gentrifying Woodlawn neighborhood.

Grove Parc's loss would significantly change the racial and economic makeup of the community.

The Grove Parc Tenants Association has a vision for turning things around and keeping their families in the Woodlawn community. They want the complex completely rehabilitated or rebuilt with at least 300 units on site and 200 in the neighborhood. They want new management and security who are accountable to the tenants association. They want programs for seniors and youth, employment opportunities, and quality day-care.

15-year Grove Parc resident Faith McGhee, told Mr. Hinsberger that Grove Parc "is home to seniors,



straight A students, single mothers, church goers, and honest working people. We are near parks, transportation, schools and my church and friends, I have a history here. Housing is a human right and I'm not going anywhere."

Over half of the complex has signed up to the Grove Parc Tenants Association (GPTA), which is led by a 14-person leadership team and is a member of Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP). The GPTA has been meeting with and gaining support from the offices of Senators Durbin and Obama, Congressman Rush, and State Senator Ken Dunkin. Now they have to convince HUD to work with them towards realizing their vision of a better future for the complex that does not exclude the 504 black families currently living there.



A Grove Parc Tenants Association Meeting

Reaping the Fruits of Victory, Sowing the Seeds of Struggle at Washington Scene

The Washington Scene Tenants Association continues reaping the fruits of its march and on and negotiations with Elzie Higginbottom's East Lake Management Company. He has now replaced the building's manager, its security company, all of the windows and almost all of the cabinets, fixed the hallways, and put up new security gates and cameras and lights on the parking lot. But as one tenant association member recently said at a press conference in front of HUD, "Management is trying to do better, but our main problem is the elevators. They break several times a week, they dropped 7 floors and injured one woman, they aggravated a senior citizen's heart condition by making her walk down 9 flights of stairs, their doors struck a pregnant woman in the head, and they have trapped myself and other tenants for up to an hour. HUD is paying plenty of money for our building. Mr. Higginbottom, where is the money?"

The Washington Scene Tenants Association, along with other members of the N.E. Illinois Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, is pushing for changes in HUD policies so that tenants can win the right to see how money destined for their homes is being spent. Washington Scene tenants insist that if they had access to the operating budget, they could show that it makes more sense to replace than to keep on patching the broken elevators. Along with other STOP members, they are heading to Atlanta from June 27th to July 1st for the U.S. Social Forum and meeting up with groups across the country working to secure the "right to the city." They will be proposing a national effort to win the right for HUD tenants to know where the money is going so that tenants associations can hold management and HUD accountable and stop the cycle of deterioration and displacement before it starts.



STOP Members Save Woodlawn Clinic and Continue the Fight for Health Care

Cook County Board President Todd Stroger is trying to balance his budget on the backs of the poor, recently announcing closures of numerous clinics and cuts to front-line health services in some of Chicago's poorest communities.

At least one clinic initially slated for closure, however, has been saved due in no small part to the efforts of STOP



members. After the budget cuts were announced, STOP members met with half of the Cook County Commissioners, turned out busloads of tenants to join the nurses union in rallies and protests, and got hundreds of patients of the Woodlawn Clinic to sign cards asking the Cook County Board not to cut essential services and to keep the clinic open.

"Closing these clinics is part of the gentrification plan," STOP board president Sharyn Payne told a crowd outside Cook County Hospital. "They take away our services then they push us out of our housing, we know the game and we aren't gonna take it!" said Ms. Payne.

The fight is far from over. Even though we managed to save the Woodlawn Clinic, recent staff cuts at the clinic are a back-door way for them to remove important community services. STOP members continue working to stop these cuts and defend the human right to health care.

Connecting Issues: STOP Members Meet with Farmworker Fighters from Florida

On April 11th, 2007, STOP tenant leaders and tomato pickers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) met at a library in Woodlawn to talk about how our struggles connect.



Workers from Immokalee explained how globalization had ruined the economies of their countries of origin and forced them to search for work in the U.S.. They ended up picking tomatoes for 40 cents a bucket, some even living in slavery forced to “repay debts” from being transported to Florida. But they have been fighting back and winning. They started with the growers themselves, going on strike, marching on the homes of abusive supervisors, and getting 5 cases of slavery exposed and prosecuted. Then they took on the people really profiting from their poverty – the fast food giants who buy the tomatoes. They launched a boycott of Taco Bell and forced an agreement doubling the wages of some workers and making Taco Bell partner with them to help end the abuses being committed against them. They were in Chicago preparing to launch a boycott of McDonalds to get the same agreement and had received word of an early victory just a day before the event.



Then tenants from STOP explained how globalization has led to poor communities of color being pushed out of Chicago. Woodlawn thrived before the steel mills were shut down, the government began tearing down housing, scaling back social programs and abandoning the community to deterioration and disinvestment. Now private owners mismanage public housing monies and the poor are rapidly being squeezed out of the neighborhoods they have lived in for years as condos pop up on every corner.

At the end of the evening, STOP's Organizing Director Ebonee Stevenson summarized the lessons of the day. “We're both organizing people who are directly affected by what's going on with globalization. One thing we all have in common is that the fight is never over. Even with your victory over McDonalds, you are already moving on to these other people who are still part of the problem. And even the tenants after our victories with HUD and some of these land owners we are still moving on to continue to fight the people who are still basically stepping on us. The people who are holding us down are trying to divide us, and it's a shame because we're both facing similar situations from the same people. Whether they be corporations or whether they be the government all of them are trying to keep us down to keep us as that lower class. Throughout the tenant struggle and the worker struggle we always need to find a way that we can work together.”

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STOP Organizer Ebonee Stevenson points out the similarities between struggles in Immokalee and Chicago

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If you believe in organizing for racial and economic justice - please support STOP! 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.