

## Defend Glendale Response to Minneapolis Public Housing Authority's (MPHA) Visioning Workshop on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015

The following is a response from the Defend Glendale Campaign and eyewitness accounts regarding the meeting held by the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at Luxton Community Center.

### **MEETING SUMMARY**

As many of you know, Thursday November 12th, the MPHA hosted a meeting for residents in Glendale's Luxton Park gymnasium. The meeting was promoted as a "Glendale Visioning Workshop."

The MPHA's flier for the event announced the following general agenda for the evening:

*Please join MPHA Staff in a visioning workshop where the Glendale Community will have the opportunity share their vision on Glendale's future. Topics will include what you like and don't like about Glendale; what parts of Glendale should be preserved, what should be improved.*

- MPHA stated during their speech they spoke to 48 people in Glendale and Prospect Park. They said a lot of the people want redevelopment, indicating that the majority they spoke with wanted redevelopment. We don't have an exact number or how this process was documented to come up with this number. MPHA did not include anything in their survey (attached) to ask specifically about redevelopment or rehab preferences.
- We have no sense of who they talked to, what they said, or how much was actually said about any particular planning preference.
- We won't be able to find answers to what was discussed and how much it was discussed through their survey—if they get back any surveys from residents—because they did not ask questions regarding residents' preferences about rehabilitation and/or redevelopment.
- The survey they used shows no translation, poor methodology, particularly if their goal is to understand what residents want with their homes, since none of the questions actually address this central matter. Instead, questions are often redundant (such as the first two questions), and are almost entirely focused on residents' perceptions of MPHA, the process, and information.
- And the reports we have heard back from Prospect Park and Glendale residents say that Biko Associates representatives' interviews are more about convincing people that redevelopment is a better option than actually listening to what residents prefer or what they are concerned about.

We think the primary goal of the interviewing and data collection efforts by Biko Associates and MPHA isn't about listening to residents or collecting information to make decisions about planning. Rather, we believe it is solely being used to learn how to frame MPHA's narrative for residents and greater audiences to buy into their redevelopment goals. This is a marketing survey to push redevelopment, and find out for developers how this information will help them build private units.

Unfortunately, during the meeting MPHA did not provide an opportunity for Glendale residents to share our ideas for Glendale's future. In fact, the agency did just the opposite: it denied many of us the basic right to stand together and present our vision for Glendale where over 30 residents worked hard to outline and present during this meeting with the support of 100 signatures from Glendale households which stated their support for the petition

To achieve this undemocratic control of the meeting, MPHA's staff did the following:

- 1) They locked the gym bleachers in order to divide residents into several language groups. We could not sit together as requested.
- 2) They would not allow over twenty-five members of Defend Glendale Campaign (all residents of Glendale) to speak or to add us to the agenda.
- 3) They would not permit a resident-based presentation for Glendale's future to be shown even though it had proven support in a petition signed by 100 residents in two days of door-knocking.
- 4) They would not allow into the agenda any points dedicated to open discussion of rehabilitation of Glendale Townhomes without demolition.
- 5) They did not provide adequate professional translation services for residents, instead often relying on their own staff to the translations, creating a clear conflict of interest.

The oppressive conditions were in direct contradiction to the promise MPHA made in their last email statement, which was sent to elected officials at the City of Minneapolis and other elected officials at various levels, where they stated that all ideas and vision from residents are welcome. This again was in direct contradiction to the stated purpose of the meeting to "share...vision[s]". As a result, we felt disrespected, shut out, pushed out of the process. Instead, we passed out our vision statement and its supporting petition of 100 residents, along with an infographic to the guests of the visioning session, which included elected officials such as Councilmember Cam Gordon, an MPHA Board member, other MPHA guests, and Prospect Park residents at the entrance to the building and as we were walking out of the meeting because we were not allowed to talk. We met as a group of Glendale and supportive Prospect Park residents outside of the gymnasium in a classroom at Luxton Park upon walking out of the "visioning session" meeting. We were happy to welcome Councilmember Cam Gordon and MN State Representative Phyllis Kahn to this impromptu meeting to discuss our dissatisfaction with MPHA's community engagement process and to present our ideas about moving forward as a unified neighborhood. (See tweet from Phyllis Kahn, <https://twitter.com/PhyllisKahn/status/665002526480056321> )

Our campaign has worked tirelessly to form bonds between people within Glendale, Prospect Park, the University of Minnesota, and the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area to do the necessary organizing and research to build a common vision for our community. We were ready to proudly share and discuss our vision with all those in attendance, but this was directly and systematically impeded by MPHA and Biko Associates at every turn, ensuring that residents' voices would be silenced.

Please take the time to read the two eyewitness accounts below about the process before and during the meeting. Together they provide a fuller understanding of why residents feel they had little choice but to exit MPHA's poorly conceived meeting. The Defend Glendale Campaign will

continue to lead the way to truly translate all our voices into a shared vision for Glendale. Thank you to all who came to the meeting and supported us!

### **THREE NON-RESIDENT ACCOUNTS OF THE MEETING**

1.” The Minneapolis Public Housing Authority called a visioning session on November 12th, 2015. This visioning session was supposed to provide a way for residents to imagine what they wanted Glendale to look like in the future. Defend Glendale was wary of the process MPHA had set up for the visioning and wished instead to sit on the bleachers in the back of the gym and present the vision they created at an earlier meeting and received 100 signatures of support for. Defend Glendale was denied the platform to present this list of demands to the meeting and was unable to share their vision of what Glendale should look like in the future and staff tried to get residents to sit at the tables set up for visioning rather than the bleachers. The vision created by residents in preparation for the meeting called for a renovation of Glendale in which basic maintenance would be performed on the townhouses, but the outside would remain intact and residents would continue to have the same low density housing they have now. When MPHA denied Defend Glendale the opportunity to present their vision, supporters of Defend Glendale walked out, after the walk out less than 10 Glendale residents remained. MPHA was dedicated to a preconceived process that served to encourage residents to come to their side, rather than listening to what the residents wanted.

The staff started their introductions and continued to try to get those who were sitting in the back to join the tables, in some cases withholding translation services for those who wanted to sit in the back, forcing residents to sit at the tables in order to receive translation. Only a very brief portion of the evening had Somali translation provided, which was provided by a staff person, not an independent translator, and they forgot to provide a Hmong translator. The opening program included a propaganda video that attempted to convince the attendees that redevelopment would be best for the residents. The executive director claimed that no one would be displaced, that they would provide generous funds for relocation. She also stressed that MPHA has not been withholding service. She claimed that MPHA was not seeking to make money off of this and that MPHA would be spending a lot of money on renovation and even more on redevelopment. After about 30 Defend Glendale residents walked about, between 9 to 10 residents from Glendale and 25 majority MPHA staff, officials, and some residents from Prospect Park, and other observers.

Participants were asked to complete several tasks in their table groups. None of the activities allowed for the possibility of keeping Glendale the same. The resident report backs were not translated for the other residents. Several groups mentioned that when they were given a choice between 6 potential ways their development could look, one of the choices should be what it looked like now. Residents stressed the importance of having their own yards and maintaining the density. Residents shared much more that they wanted to stay the same about Glendale than change. The few residents that remained supported renovation fixing, repair, not redevelopment. Based on discussion with some participants in the Defend Glendale meeting the week before, staff either convinced the residents to support redevelopment, or misreported what residents said to them.

During the sharing a Defend Glendale supporter was assaulted and staff did nothing in response to the assault. After the sharing from the small groups they said that Defend Glendale's petition would be considered, and that residents should return the surveys they distributed to the management office with no translation. MPHA staff complained about Defend Glendale. Meanwhile, Defend Glendale met upstairs to strategize about the future. They were joined by Minnesota Representative Phyllis Kahn and Council Member Cam Gordon. Kahn and Gordon continued to show support for the residents of Glendale and the work of Defend Glendale.”

Elizabeth Showalter, U of M Graduate Student in Urban Planning, observer

2. “Defend Glendale had asked for some time at the beginning of the meeting to present a petition with 100 signatures, supporting the resident-led visioning process for rehabilitation. MPHA did not allow this, even at the request of Cam Gordon. MPHA also refused to open up the bleachers so that people could sit there to observe rather than participate. About 35 DG members went upstairs after leaving the visioning session to talk with Cam Gordon and Rep. Phyllis Kahn.

There were about 9 residents that stayed behind. The others I had thought were residents were MPHA staff members. MPHA assured me that they are NOT pursuing 600 units at Glendale and are honestly looking at a rehab model. They are continuing to explore other, smaller redevelopment models that would be more of a hybrid--preserving existing units along with potential new units along 27th. Funding remains the key issue. MPHA was not videotaping the proceedings. Both cameras were from DG. A request was made at the meeting for MPHA to create an opt-in email list for direct communications.

I sat at a table with two Somali-speaking Glendale residents and three other homeowners. A Somali Management Aid from MPHA interpreted for the residents. Because of the language differences we had two different conversations, and then came together to talk about the questions. One interesting observation was that the MPHA employee talking with the Glendale residents approached the questions from the perspective that redevelopment would happen (which he stated remained MPHA's intention), so discussion at our table strayed along different lines of inquiry because of different assumptions. The materials supplied by MPHA supported the notion that MPHA continues to support higher density and redevelopment. In providing photos of possible architectural styles, none of the existing buildings was included.

This was the last MPHA meeting at Luxton in 2015.”

Summary from Serafine Scheel, Prospect Park resident, Board member of Prospect Park Association, and participants of the visioning process.

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