



Defend Glendale Campaign Statement: Troubling Actions by Minneapolis Public Housing Authority. Who is Responsible?

Background

In June 2015, the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) proposed a plan to use a federal (HUD) program called Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) to offer the 184 units of Glendale Townhomes (in the Prospect Park neighborhood) to private developers, demolishing and converting the public housing into high-density, privately owned housing units, including low-income Section 8, mixed income and market rate housing units. The townhomes, and the 14.5 acres of land and green space on which it is located, is currently publically owned. At any given time, about 570-600 people live at Glendale, over half of which are children. In July 2015, the City of Minneapolis temporarily halted MPHA's rushed RAD redevelopment proposal and instead called on MPHA to work with residents and go back to the drawing board: "Due to the large number of concerns and questions and general lack of clarity regarding this action, City of Minneapolis leadership determined it best to...not take any action on the Plan at this time."¹

Lack of Transparency

Since this time, MPHA has hosted monthly meetings (with the exceptions of December 2015 and January 2016) with Glendale and broader Prospect Park residents to discuss potential plans for the future of Glendale. The last public meeting, held on November 12th at Luxton Park Community Center, resulted in the majority of Glendale residents (present at the meeting) walking out in protest against MPHA's refusal to allow Glendale residents to discuss the "vision" they had put together collaboratively the week before and had garnered over 100 signatures in support of that vision from only a single weekend of canvassing around Glendale and the numbers are growing. Because the Glendale Townhomes lacks a formal resident council—which was shut down in February 2015 after all officers resigned out of fear of harassment and withholding of entitled resident council resources to build the council—a grassroots campaign of Glendale residents, Defend Glendale, was formed and has been actively meeting, organizing, and engaging in collective actions to represent the voices of Glendale residents to MPHA. The majority of residents of Glendale have repeatedly told MPHA at public meetings since June 2015 that they do not want to see Glendale redeveloped nor any increase in unit density, but rather have clearly called for rehabilitation and repairs of existing units without resident displacement or privatization. MPHA is still yet to put forward any rehabilitation plan or a budget, despite six months passing since the City Council's decision to place the project into a moratorium period. All the while, essential repairs and maintenance for the Townhomes has been largely neglected, including improving the heat (MPHA controls the heat and keeps it at temperatures so low that it is detrimental to residents' health and wellbeing), rodent infestations, and unhealthy mold.

Controlling Glendale Committee of Prospect Park Neighborhood Association

In addition to the Defend Glendale campaign, residents of Glendale and broader Prospect Park have also worked to address this matter through the local neighborhood association (Prospect Park Association [PPA]), forming its

¹ City of Minneapolis, Community Planning and Economic Development, July 8, 2015 letter to residents.

own Glendale Committee. Recently, MPHA staff became members of the local neighborhood association, and joined the Glendale Committee, despite the obvious conflict of interest with MPHA's involvement as residents' landlord in a committee whose primary charge is to help build relationships between residents of Glendale and residents of broader Prospect Park. Though this is technically legal within the bylaws and regulations of MPHA, the City of Minneapolis, and the PPA, the rules for HUD resident councils clearly create an intentional barrier between public housing agencies' staff and the resident council and the residents elected to resident council positions. In the absence of a formal resident council at Glendale, MPHA is violating the spirit of that rule by having its staff join the Glendale Committee at PPA as a voting member. In fact, on January 14th, MPHA not only had a staff representative at the Committee meeting for the first time (PPA bylaws state that any business, nonprofit, or government entity can have one representative voting member), they also had two additional MPHA staff join, as well, and thus completely coopting what is meant to be a resident space. In addition, Glendale resident leaders continue to be marginalized in this space and pressured to leave the committee through many aggressive actions.

Coercing Glendale residents during income recertification

At the same this happened, MPHA was/is conducting their annual income assessments to determine all residents' rent level and eligibility. Though this is a standard, annual practice, this year during the month of January, they then asked all residents to meet in a private room with Glendale property managers (MPHA) to discuss the future of Glendale, give them their own biased "information sheet" about the potential options for Glendale's future, and then asked residents if they wanted to stay or move, redevelop or rehabilitate the Townhomes. In other words, they are conducting a verbal survey with residents, many of which do not speak English as their first language, in a closed-door meeting with their landlords, immediately following their income assessment, thus taking advantage of residents' vulnerability in order to coerce information from them. Residents have repeatedly called on MPHA since the beginning of this process to be transparent and accountable, ethical, demanding that all such meetings and information collection happen in public meetings and spaces, not hidden behind closed doors where residents can be manipulated and pressured by the power differential between public housing residents and their landlords who determine their housing fate. This violates every research ethic regarding non-coercive, non-intimidating data collection strategies, instead taking advantage of their position of power to coerce and intimidate residents.

Though there are many other practices and actions by MPHA that have deeply troubled residents since the start of this process, their recent actions highlight not only their refusal to actually listen to residents' demands, but also to take advantage of their position as landlords to coerce residents into supporting MPHA's preferred plans for the future of Glendale to try to take over Glendale Committee Prospect Park Association. In the meantime, the Defend Glendale campaign is partnering with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to analyze MPHA's financial statements to systematically prove MPHA's long-term disinvestment strategy with Glendale in order to justify its demolition and redevelopment—which preliminary analyses seem to support. MPHA is one of about three dozen PHAs around the country who have been designated by HUD as "Moving to Work" PHAs, which is a HUD program that essentially deregulates the use of MPHA's funds across its various programs. As recent light on the Moving to Work program in Chicago Public Housing Authority has revealed, it allows PHAs to more easily abuse their financial practices and to strategically disinvest in particular

areas without ramifications.² We are concerned that MPHA may also be acting in similar ways as Chicago Public Housing Authority with regard to its Moving to Work status, and the disinvestment in the Glendale Townhomes may very well be evidence of MPHA's institutionally abusive practices.

MPHA leaves its residents in the cold

As dire evidence of one of the many ways that Defend Glendale contends MPHA has systematically and strategically disinvested in the Glendale Townhomes, the recent onslaught of frigid temperatures this winter has exposed Glendale residents to sickness and other related health concerns due to the cold temperatures in the Townhomes units. MPHA also invested much less in the Glendale Townhomes than the average and median amount invested in its other public housing units of the energy savings contract funds with Honeywell in 2009-2011. The average amount invested from the Honeywell contract across MPHA's public housing portfolio was \$393,488 and the median was \$470,019.³ Between \$134,217 and \$169,366 was spent on Glendale, and those funds were used for improving water use efficiency rather than heating/cooling efficiency measures, which are frequently cited as major issues among Glendale residents, particularly during the bitter cold winter months. In other words, MPHA spent about \$225,000-\$335,000 less on Glendale than the average and median investment in all of their public housing properties, and their investment at Glendale did not directly address the most pressing energy-related issues that Glendale residents face. For example, most of MPHA's public housing sites received "building ventilation system redesign" and high efficiency hot water boilers; Glendale received none of these. Scattered site housing received new thermopane windows, attic insulation, and wall insulation; Glendale received none of these, despite residents' repeated complaints about and its desperate need for improving the lack of insulation that keeps their units unsafely cold during the winter.

In response, Defend Glendale campaign has obtained a few digital thermometer data collection devices and have placed them in different units to record the actual internal unit temperatures. When this heating issue was brought up to MPHA officials at the recent PPA Glendale Committee meeting, they insisted that residents should call maintenance in order to have the lack of heat addressed. Residents present at the meeting pushed back, claiming that residents have called in work orders but that they go unaddressed by MPHA maintenance—which MPHA officials present at the meeting denied. However, just a few days later when the air temperature never reached the positive digits the entire weekend, phone conversations were witnessed between residents and MPHA emergency maintenance services, which denied their requests to increase the heat because their thermostats—controlled by MPHA—read "72 degrees F," and as a result they claimed there was nothing that MPHA could do about it. Instead, they instructed residents to "wear extra layers of clothing." Many residents have become ill as a result of the inescapable cold in their units, with some children getting pneumonia. In the meantime, MPHA continues to systematically deny residents any means to address what is an immediate, pressing health concern and safety issue. As evidenced by their choice to not invest in heat-efficiency improvements in Glendale, and their institutional practices which deny residents' complaints, MPHA's disinvestment and strategic neglect of Glendale is having very real, detrimental effects on residents lives, safety, and sense of place and wellbeing. Who is responsible to take immediate actions against MPHA's violations?

² <https://newrepublic.com/article/125056/rahm-emanuels-next-scandal-chicagos-public-housing>

³ The reason for the cost range is due to conflicting data: the Honeywell Contract data calculates out to the \$134,217 figure, whereas MPHA's capital expenditure data indicates the \$169,366 figure. It should be noted that these figures do not include spending at MPHA's scattered site housing because the expenditure data for these sites were less clear, though these certainly take up a large portion of their investments.