

**Comments: City of Minneapolis, Mayor Betsy Hodges and Council Members**

**Regarding: Hiring of New Executive Director of Minneapolis Public Housing Authority,**

**(MPHA), Mr. Gregory P. Russ**

**Date: December 6, 2016**

On November 29 at 1:00 pm, we found that City of Minneapolis, Community Development & Regulatory Services Committee was going to hold a hearing to approve the new Executive Director of MPHA, Mr. Gregory P. Russ. A request for committee action was presented by lead staff and Deputy Director of the city’s department of Community Planning & Economic Development (CPED) Chuck Lutz. Mr. Lutz also happens to be on the board of MPHA. Earlier this year one letter went out to all MPHA residents city wide for one listening session to hear what the residents want, after that we did not get any follow up from MPHA on the progress of the search. This was not a transparent process to hear diverse voice from residents of Minneapolis. After that listening session, MPHA did not update citywide any progress on the hiring process. We were never introduced to the final list of candidates to provide feedback. They created a hiring committee that had one MPHA resident, and the rest were city council members, city officials and MPHA board members. Residents at citywide level or at any level were not notified of the final selection. After a long silence, we found out that Mr. Russ was chosen and approved without proper engagement or notification to all MPHA residents. <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-190263.pdf>

Beyond the lack of transparent community engagement in this selection process, we have several deep concerns about the selection process that need to be on record. We are concerned that neither elected officials nor the public clearly understand the legal and financial relationship between the City of Minneapolis and MPHA. As concerned residents, we have repeatedly raised questions of MPHA’s accountability to the City of Minneapolis. In response, City Council and City staff have been repeatedly told us that MPHA is an independent entity and City of Minneapolis has little oversight with the exception of nominating the Commissioners. Understanding the relationship of accountability is especially important in the context of how MPHA has been using tactics of abuse, neglect, retaliation, and intimidation to disenfranchise the Glendale Community.

But Defend Glendale and various Minneapolis housing organizers have learned that the narrative that the City of Minneapolis has no oversight over MPHA is false. By reading through public documents from the City and MPHA, we have learned that the City of Minneapolis has a much bigger role in dictating the affairs of MPHA than what City Council and City staff has been telling us for the last 2 years.

* + The public record shows that in the hiring process for Mr. Russ as New Executive Director of MPHA, elected City officials such as Council Member Lisa Goodman were directly involved in the hiring process and the committee to select Mr. Russ as the new director of MPHA. <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-190263.pdf>
  + The same council member is Chair of the Community Development & Regulatory Services Committee where the hearing for Mr. Russ was heard and approved on November 29. The final vote goes to City Council on December 9th and is likely to be approved unanimously because Mayor Betsy Hodges and Council Member Lisa Goodman are very impressed with Mr. Russ’s national record in public housing which is to convert public housing to private development which leads to displacing and gentrifying communities across the nation. This is the record and plans Glendale has been fighting. Therefore, we don’t think with Mr. Russ’s record and past practices will protect Glendale or any public housing in Minneapolis. We are concerned that Mr. Russ's record will push demolition, privatization plans of public housing so corporate, and private developers can profit and benefit, and in turn gentrify our city. We are concerned that these plans will be more aggressive across the city then before which will put over 20,000 residents MPHA residents at risk including Glendale Townhomes.
  + Given the city’s role in the hiring process of Mr. Russ, it is clear to us that City of Minneapolis plays a bigger role in managing and overseeing MPHA than previously stated.
  + We, as residents of Minneapolis, residents of MPHA, the Defend Glendale Campaign, and anti-gentrification housing justice movement will hold the city accountable for MPHA’s role in how they treat residents and how they make future plans in regard to Glendale. We will hold the City of Minneapolis responsible for any adverse actions Mr. Russ takes on MPHA residents, any development plans that displace residents and gentrify our communities, and any displacement or demolition plans for the Glendale Townhomes. Given that Legal Aid published 46 pages of corrective action on MPHA abuses, it is clear that the mistreatments, displacement and demolition plans of MPHA are no longer behind closed doors. Link to Legal Aid: [**http://tinyurl.com/LegalAidtoMPHA**](http://tinyurl.com/LegalAidtoMPHA)

Given Defend Glendale’s negative experience with MPHA’s plans to demolish and privatize the Glendale Townhomes through Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) and divestment in repairs for Glendale through Moving to Work (MTW), which deregulated MPHA, we are concerned with the degree to which Mr. Russ has championed both programs in previous cities he’s worked in.

* + We are especially concerned that Mr. Russ’ bio explicitly identifies him as a “national expert” in converting public housing to private development. This is precisely the fight that Defend Glendale is engaged in to protect our homes and community against displacement and to preserve public housing. <http://www.mphaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Gregory-Russ-Bio-MPHA.pdf>

We hope that given our very negative experience with MPHA’s community engagement process, or at times lack of a community engagement process altogether, we expect and will demand of new MPHA leadership to implement a transparent and accountable strategy and policy of engaging public housing residents. In order to protect public housing as a public good, we must resist privatization for profit where tax dollars and tax breaks benefit corporate millionaires. Public housing is a public good that should benefit the people that need it most: this is especially important as Minneapolis is fighting to resist gentrification which is used as a tool to destroy public housing and to push working class and low-income people of color out of Minneapolis to move to all white suburbs that lack transportation links, and where these families feel unsafe.

**Sincerely,**

**Defend Glendale Campaign**

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