

Detroit delayed CDC funding: Management by intimidation, one director

Ron Seigel

Michigan Citizen

03-11-1995

Several Detroit Citizen District Councils, set up to provide citizen representation to urban renewal residents, did not get funding appropriated for them until late in the fiscal year.

Citizen district councils were established by state law in the 60's, after charges that urban renewal programs removed Black people and the poor from land without providing adequate relocation.

The district councils were set up to give residents an advisory voice in programs affecting their neighborhoods.

The fiscal year starts every July 1st. Ann Powell director of the Brush Park Citizens District Council said their district council did not receive funding until February of this year - approximately eight months late.

Powell charged an employee of the city's Planning and Development Department named Sheila Wade "delayed the process."

Powell also said Wade cut off funding for the district council from February - June, 1994.

POWELL SAID even when the money arrived, the district council only received two thirds of the amount appropriated, or \$20,000 rather than \$35,000.

Powell said because it had no money the district council was not able to meet

expenses and taxes nor even pay its staff for eight months. Powell said other staff members quit, but she was in a financial position where she was able to stay. The only help she had came from board members and community residents who volunteered, she said.

Powell called the delay "harassment" and "management by intimidation," but said the problem was not caused by the Archer Administration, but a personal grudge by Wade.

Wade got along with the district council, Powell claimed, until council members challenged her for misrepresenting the council's position before the Detroit City Council on certain issues.

Wade said she could not comment on why the district council failed to get the money suggested The Michigan Citizen call two administrators of the Planning and Economic Development Department, Angela Bradby, its developer and Ron Files, the assistant director.

Neither Files nor Bradby were available for comment by the time of this deadline.

MARY TIBBS, director of the Virginia Park Citizens District Council stated her district council had not received city funding until December, 1994 - six months late.

Rohlann Callender, Director of the University City "A" Citizens District Council, said his district council did not receive the money until February, but that his district council had no criticism of the city. Jack Mann of the Planning and Development Department said because of red tape, the city was not able to fund district councils on schedule.

He added though that part of the delay with the UCA district council was the difficulty district council staff had in filling out the elaborate paper work.

Part of that, he admitted, was caused by past delays in funding by the city, which made it more difficult for staff members to handle their work.

Detroit's defunded CDCs consider protest

Ron Seigel

Michigan Citizen

06-03-1995

Detroit's defunded CDCs consider protest.

The Detroit City Council approved a block grant budget which would allow only nine out of the 14 citizen district councils (CDC) to choose their own individual staffs.

According to Deputy Director of the Planning and Development Department, Clintina Simms, the budget stated that four CDCs - Brush Park, McDougall Hunt, Medical Center and Art Center would receive "Centralized administrative assistance" from Mayor Dennis Archer's staff.

Robert Davis of the Detroit City Council's City Planning Commission said \$125,000 was allocated to the Archer Administration for the purpose of staffing these five CDCs. Both Simms and Darchelle Strickland from Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer's office state the details have still to be worked out.

Simms stated she was not sure what the City Council meant to do with the Woodbridge CDC which Archer Administration officials shut down last year.

ACCORDING TO state law and city ordinance the Woodbridge CDC still exists, even though it had neither a staff or an office. It was not listed by the City Council either for funding or "centralized administrative assistance."

Rosemary Peralta, an aide to Councilman Mel Ravitz, said that Woodbridge CDC was told that it could "always seek advice from the administration."

CDCs were created under state law in 1968 to represent residents in urban renewal areas and provide them with input.

Community residents charged the city administration was removing Black people, minorities and poor white people from their homes and failed to provide them with adequate relocation, in order to serve business and suburban interests.

CDC staff members charge today that depriving a CDC of the power to pick its own staff and forcing it to rely on "centralized assistance" from the city administration could mean that it would only receive information the administration wanted them to have.

WITHOUT A STAFF, CDC members and community residents who work would be deprived of advocates to lobby city council or city agencies for community goals or interests. By contrast large businesses would have representatives who could argue before the city for the interests of the business on company time.

One staff member accused Council President Maryann Mahaffey of "paternalism." Mahaffey reportedly stated in her budget message that it was necessary for city councils to "evaluate" each CDC in terms of their ability to provide a vehicle through which they can participate in redevelopment decisions and activities."

The CDC staff member said that in the democratic process it was the people who should be in control, and government officials should not have the power to tell them how it should operate or "evaluate" it. Neither Mahaffey or her staff members could be reached for comment. Brush Park CDC-director, Ann Powell, one of those that did not get funded, "The people are quite surprised, and indignant." Powell said those in her

area were particularly upset that the city rejected funding for Brush Park CDC, but provided funding for a development corporation the CDC formed, which included outside interests and mayoral appointees.

She said some community groups were considering whether there were grounds to ask the federal government to reject the city's block grant plan and to insist that money be given to CDCs.

Others were planning to ask the Detroit Charter Commission to make it mandatory in the new charter to provide funding for CDC staff in the same way it provided funding for the salaries of city officials and the staff of the city council's City Planning Commission.

POWELL SAID that because this fiscal years planning and Development Department staff member Sheila Wade held back money the city council allocated to Brush Park CDC for only received \$20,000 of the \$144,000 it was supposed to get.

Powell said Brush Park CC may seek an extension of its contract, so it could continue its work next year.

Powell said because of it, she only received one check during this fiscal year.

Wade was not available for comment.

Powell said as its director, she herself received only one check in the entire fiscal year.

In his proposed budget Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer asked that independent staffs be eliminated for all CDCs, replaced by a "centralized staff." The city council rejected that, allocating independent staffs for nine of the fourteen CDCs.

Citizens seek volunteers to protect people's rights

Ron Seigel

Michigan Citizen

02-27-1999

Public officials, including Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer, have called on volunteers to deal with community problems and emergencies.

At its Tuesday February 9 meeting, the Brush Park Citizens District Council voted to appeal for volunteers to help it "protect the rights of residents, businesses, as property owners."

Those who wish to help can call an answering service at (313) 863-3450.

In the 60s citizen district councils were created under state law to guard residents of urban renewal areas from abuses by city officials.

Urban renewal was originally created under federal law to rid cities of slums and assure "a decent home for every American family."

In practice, however, urban renewal has been used to move out people with low incomes in order to move in those who are more affluent under the justification that they can provide a better tax base for the city. Some charge this has lowered the stock of low income housing, created more slums and even increased the amount of homelessness.

In the past in Detroit, citizen district councils were given a staff and office equipment so that they could make independent studies of what was going on and lobby for what the people wanted.

Since Archer took office, however, almost all citizen district councils had their offices closed and their staff removed.

Archer claims that this was in response to district council wrongdoing. However, some representatives of district councils charge this was a power play to prevent residents from fighting for their area against business interests.

Gwen Mingo, Chairperson of the Brush Park Citizens District Council said her own district council is unable to perform its function in the community under state law.

"Without a staff, we can't keep a handle on all the things that are going on in this community while the greatest development in America's history is slated to occur here," Mingo said. "We don't know what is going on. You have a ball confusion."

Some residents express suspicions that special business interests wants to "get their fingers in and take land and property" and that Brush Park "may be the next Graitmark."

Graitmark is the proposed eastside development where the company that employs Dennis Archer Jr. got a nobid right to over 80 acres of land. Residents there must sell to the city and move despite the quality of their homes.

Without a staff, Mingo said, the district council can not investigate such charges or keep the community informed about development. Mingo stated three million dollars was spent on development in the area, but the district council does not know where the money has been going.

"Communication regarding development is not filtered down," she said. "They (administration officials) come to us (only) after they made the plan (and ask them to approve it after the fact)."

William Burke of the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) told The Michigan Citizen last fall that he tells district councils only about development plans his department accepts, not those it rejects.

However, Mingo says, "We're supposed to be involved in the planning. Residents, property owners and businesses are supposed to benefit."

Evaluating the plans the city makes, she said, is "very difficult, because we don't have a staff to do administrative work."

District council members also have no equipment, including copy machines or even note paper.

She noted that district council members are grassroots people with limited financial resources who have difficulties dealing with well-financed opponents. Without a paid staff to represent community residents, she says, district councils have great difficulty presenting their views before the Detroit City Council.

Individual members, she stated, have jobs and are unable to take time to go to city council meetings to speak for the people. She said she herself lost \$90 taking of work going to her won district council meetings. In addition, she added, members lose \$20-\$30 in parking fees.

Staff members representing the views of the city government administration or special business interests get paid for the time they attend city council meetings.

There is a new district council, she said, but because the city's P&DD has seized the district council's records, the new members can not get their files so they can get evidence of what went on in the past. Because district councils no longer have offices, Mingo said, citizens facing problems because of city policies can not go to them. She

added it was difficult to seek out area residents, because people are suspicious of those trying to go into their houses.

District councils are asking the City Council to get their funds, offices and equipment back. However, because of the development taking place now, Mingo indicates that irreversible damage may occur before the city council acts.

For this reason she said, the district council is asking for volunteers from Detroit all the way to Benton Harbor to look into matters. It is also seeking donations of supplies and equipment, including a phone, office space and even paper.

The district council is also interested in those who have secretarial skills and those with knowledge about economic development, legal issues involving local, state and federal government, funding allocations, condemnation law, budget and finance.

Mingo states that she is a former administrator for the Berrien County Court and through her work in the court system began the first home detention program in the state. She received the key to the City of Detroit for organizing civic and community affairs under the late Mayor Coleman Young.

Brush Park residents sue city

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

05-06-2000

Brush Park residents sue city

In a suit filed April 21 in Wayne County Circuit Court, approximately 150 residents of the Brush Park urban renewal area charged Detroit Mayor Dennis

Archer and other Detroit officials with gentrification. According to the suit, the city is "unlawfully engaging in a conspiracy... for the purpose of putting existing people out of the community, taking their land and property." and "promoting racial segregation in housing."

In a legal brief, residents charge city officials with several things, including exempting Caucasian residents from property confiscation, fostering blight in order to secure land, failing to relocate citizens displaced as a result of development, and destroying the area's Citizen District Council in order to support business interests.

Because the City of Detroit" has failed to protect the health, safety, and welfare to residents and property owners," the brief said, the Brush Park Community "looks like a war zone" and residents" are plagued with insecurity and fear of what will happen to them" and "have no one to represent them."

Greg Bowens, Archer's press secretary, denied these charges.

"We have no intention of promoting racial segregation," he said. "This is a Black city. They're Black. We're Black. No one's embarking on a crusade to get rid of residents. The goal is not to move people out of Detroit, but to have a better quality of life [and] new opportunities."

"Change always causes a certain amount of fear," Bowens said. "We're not going to get involved in fear, in paranoia, and engaging in hyperbole."

When asked about the City Planning Commission's report about the "confusing" language in the Brush Park Development Plan, that determines

whose homes will be taken, Bowens said, "That's their opinion. We're not confused about what our goals are for improving the quality of life."

Bowens said Michigan has the strongest property ownership and rights laws in the nation.

"You can't make people move out of their homes," he said. "This is not an autocracy, a theocracy, or a dictatorship."

However, Bowens did indicate that homes could be taken by the government to improve the neighborhood. "It's never an easy or pleasant process for anyone." he said.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Brush Park CDC chair on stand to help seniors stay in their homes

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

06-03-2000

Brush Park CDC chair on stand to help seniors stay in their homes

Gwen Mingo, chair of the citizens district council (CDC) representing Brush Park residents, testified in a court hearing challenging the right of the Detroit city government to take the home of senior citizen and veteran Nathaniel Jackson and his wife, Annie.

Examined by the Jacksons' attorney, Orlando Avant, and cross-examined for

several hours by city attorney James Cobb, Jr., Mingo is stated to come back for redirect to the court of Judge Michael F. Sapala on the 7th floor of the City County Building at 10 a.m., Tuesday, May 30.

Mingo indicated she personally hopes Detroiters will attend the hearing, to show their concern about the issue, noting whatever decision the court makes in this case could "set a precedent" on the urban renewal powers of city government.

Mingo said she believes current Detroit urban renewal policies "threaten the property rights of everyone," charging they "displace people and move them from their homes" so that more affluent people can move in and developers can make a profit. Mingo said the Jacksons held onto their property for years, hoping they would benefit, from new development in the area, only to find the new development plans specified their removal.

If they lose the case, she warned, the best they can hope for is to "contentedly look from a senior citizen building at other people enjoying land they worked for." Poor people who are younger, she said, will not get any relocation at all.

On the stand, Mingo claimed the city had no legal right to seize the land, because it failed to follow procedures set by state law for public input and a plan to relocate residents in the area.

She said city officials did the planning without the involvement of the CDC, in violation of state Public Act 344, and held private meetings with the area's development corporation to do the planning, violating the Open Meetings Act.

After the city objected that Mingo could not determine what the law said because she was not a lawyer, Sapala instructed the Jacksons' attorney to "steer clear of the witness giving opinion on legal conclusions."

However, after the court ruled favorable on his own objection, the city lawyer continually asked her questions on legal issues during cross examination.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Brush Park CDC calls for criminal grand jury

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

07-01-2000

Brush Park CDC calls for criminal grand jury

At its June 20 meeting, the Brush Park Citizens District Council (CDC), representing residents, businesses, and institutions in Detroit's Brush Park urban renewal area, unanimously voted to ask for a criminal grand jury investigation on the use of federal funds in their Brush Park urban renewal program.

The announcement came about two weeks after city officials themselves revealed the city committed violations of state and federal urban renewal laws.

Sylvia Crawford, head of public relations for the Detroit Planning and Development Department (P&DD) under Mayor Dennis Archer, said the city demolished a historic building at 314 Erskine without notifying the Detroit Historic District Commission.

William Worden of the Detroit Historic Advisory Board said according to Detroit's Historic District Ordinance, before a historically designated building can be torn down, the Historic District Commission has to hold a special hearing and grant a permit.

A report by the City Planning Commission, which works under the Detroit City Council, stated the city also violated federal law,

"Any demolition conducted in a historic district that is paid for with federal dollars must be reviewed under the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act," the report said.

"No review under Section 106 was conducted for this demolition," it added.

The CDC passed another resolution by Edith Woodbury, charging the city with "perpetrating fraud" for failing to carry out the urban renewal objectives in the plan. One of the objectives, Woodbury said, was to preserve historic buildings,

But those in attendance at the June 20 meeting said the illegal demolition was part of a general plan to move people out of their homes, give their land to developers, and promote racial and economic segregation.

Martha Coleman, a resident of the Brewster Housing Project, charged the

city's plans to privatize public housing would enable the city to sell public housing units and "leave senior citizens without places to stay."

CDC official Gwen Mingo warned if the historic buildings were torn down and the area could no longer be a historic district, Archer and City Council would be free to utilize Public Act 388. The legislation allows the city to eliminate elected district councils, replacing them with puppet organizations chosen by City Council, not residents.

Last fall, the CDC called for an audit of the \$32 million allocated by the federal government to help people rehabilitate their homes.

Mingo said the city had to use blight as a pretense for taking people's property under urban renewal.

Residents have expressed suspicions the \$32 million may have been misappropriated.

When asked about the Brush Park situation April 30, U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Andrew Cuomo said he knew nothing about the issues involved, but said that promoting segregation was a violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which HUD was obliged to prosecute.

HUD spokeswoman Maria Peralte promised to consult the Detroit HUD office about urban renewal policies, but so far has failed to provide information.

"Our City Council is busy destroying all our African American heritage, and our buildings, and running us over to 18th and Magnolia in houses made of match sticks and glue," said Northwest Goldberg activist Juanita Newton said, expressing concerns that discriminatory urban renewal practices are a

citywide problem.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Mass evictions possible for Brush Park residents

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

09-02-2000

Mass evictions possible for Brush Park residents

Brush Park resident Betty Clark says a government official recently told her that all tenants at 125 Adelaide and a nearby building at 2126 John R. would be seized under the drug forfeiture act.

A 1996 federal indictment against the owner of both buildings, Joe Foster, Jr., is to blame.

"These people don't have anywhere to go," Clark said. "Not that quick."

She said the tenants were waiting for subsidized housing in Presbyterian Village to be built, but plans for construction have been delayed indefinitely.

Janie Scott of Presbyterian Village confirmed that homes will not be completed there in the spring. She added residents displaced by urban renewal in Brush Park would not receive special consideration.

Clark says the city has promised Brush Park senior citizens relocation money, but they have yet to receive it, and relocating - even paying application fees - is expensive.

"Some have died waiting," Clark said. "I feel it's terrible."

Speculation has stirred in the neighborhood that the mass evictions are part of a general process of making room for affluent housing and upscale commercial development. The neighborhood is adjacent to the recently-constructed Comerica Park.

But what creates a new dimension of fear in the community as a whole is that the owner of both buildings, Joe Foster, Jr. Foster, was shot to death in 1997. Two months later, his business partner and girlfriend, Teretha Hinton, was shot at the same location.

Some members of the community expressed suspicions that Foster and Hinton were killed by special interests anxious to get the land for redevelopment in the area. Others claim it was because Foster had been indicted on drug charges and the drug lords were afraid he might reveal their activities if he got on the stand.

However, even before Foster's death, Detroit News reporter David Josar wrote that a number of area residents believed the drug indictments were made because some officials wanted to seize his property under the drug forfeiture act.

The News stated that three of the parcels in the 100 block of East Montcalm were about to be bought by Wayne County to create new stadiums for the

Detroit Lions and Detroit Tigers.

Brush Park resident Ruth Diggs says she has been intimidated by people she suspects have an interest in her property.

Diggs said her 50-yard fence was knocked down one night. When she put up a new fence a few days later, it was knocked down again.

Brush Park resident Barbara Womack has an even more extreme story. She said one day when she returned home from work, she found her apartment building was demolished. The city claimed the building was razed by mistake.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Cops arrest Brush Park activist

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

10-21-2000

Cops arrest Brush Park activist

Gwendolyn Mingo says her opposition to the city's urban renewal practices has made her a target.

Mingo was arrested October 10 and held over eight hours at Detroit's Third Police Precinct. She says while detained she was attacked, threatened, denied medical care and demoralized.

Mingo chairs the Brush Park Citizens District Council (CDC), and has been a

vocal critic of the displacement of the area's mostly-Black residents in the wake of burgeoning development. The neighborhood is adjacent to the newly-constructed Comerica Park.

Mingo says she believes police arrested her in order to prevent her from attending an important CDC meeting, where Detroit Planning and Development Director Paul

Bernard was scheduled to face citizen complaints and CDC lawyers intended to map out a legal strategy in their fight against gentrification.

Mingo said the two officers who stopped her didn't seem to be able to settle on a reason for pulling her over, first claiming she was playing her car radio too loudly, then charging her with speeding, and finally bringing up an earlier traffic violation she received in Battle Creek.

"They didn't know why they were stopping me," Mingo said.

Mingo added although she was stopped on West Forest and 14th, within the 13th Police Precinct, she was taken far out of the way to the Third Precinct office in Southwest Detroit.

"This is because I knew and worked with people in the 13th Precinct," Mingo said. "They didn't want to place me with people I knew."

To make matters worse, Mingo's lawyer was unable to locate her, as police held her under the name Jane Doe.

At the Precinct, Officer R. Saenz refused to answer questions about the charges. Saenz referred all questions to the Department's Public

Information Office.

Saenz reportedly told others Mingo was arrested on a fugitive warrant, but refused to mention what the warrant was for. He said she would be released on bond as soon as her fingerprints were processed.

Mingo later said the fugitive warrant was related to the traffic violation in Battle Creek.

A Police Department spokesman the next day said Mingo was held only on a reckless driving charge. She added Mingo was scheduled to appear in 36th District Court October 17.

Mingo said the police refused to read her rights and denied her treatment for a medical condition. She said officers threatened to hit her with a mace can, gave false and contradictory reports about when she would be released, directed obscene words at her, removed her wig and threw it on the floor, and ridiculed her.

"It's not a Police Department," she said. "It's a cult."

Community activist Brenda Smith said she shares Mingo's suspicions that the arrest was linked to Mingo's service to the Brush Park community and her legal challenge to the city.

"I've seen harassment in urban renewal," said Smith, "but never of this magnitude."

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Brush Park seniors displaced by drug raid

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

10-21-2000

Federal agents have seized two Brush Park apartment buildings that had been owned by the late Joe Foster, Jr. under drug forfeiture laws.

Foster owned several properties in the area, and had been accused of drug trafficking.

Gwen Mingo, chairperson of the Brush Park Citizens District Council, says the government evicted some of the tenants when the property was seized, and is now taking measures to throw out the rest.

Mingo expressed concern that some of the residents, who are senior citizens, may face homelessness. She says she and her husband plan to move some of them into her own home, but she cannot help them all.

Ellen Christensen, Assistant Chief of the Civil Division in the U.S.

Attorney's Office, says it is standard procedure to evict tenants in drug forfeiture cases. She says the federal government intends to auction the properties off and sell them to the highest bidder.

But the houses in question are located in an urban renewal area, where poorer residents are being displaced and the land is given to developers to

build homes for the affluent. Because the land is near Comerica Park, it is particularly valuable, and the new owners may get a windfall.

Christensen said the federal government showed "particular sensitivity" to the people in the area because it let them know about the forfeiture suit in advance, and gave them time to get new housing.

But community activists say the seniors are unlikely to find new homes, no matter how much time the federal government gives. They say there is a shortage of houses low income people can afford precisely because of federal policies like urban renewal and the destruction of public housing units.

Because the land is in an urban renewal area, the federal government would ordinarily be obligated to provide the tenants with comparable relocation and pay the difference in rent up to three years. However, since the land was seized in a drug forfeiture case, the federal government is absolved from this obligation.

According to a 1996 newspaper article, just after Foster was indicted a number of people in the area expressed the belief the government was "going after Foster" because his buildings, increased in value. They said the drug allegations were merely a pretext for seizing newly valuable land.

Foster was shot and killed in front of his restaurant in October 1997 Mingo said he was never convicted of the charges raised against him.

Christensen said she was only recently assigned the case and did not know for certain, but admitted Foster "probably" was not convicted.

Christensen said Foster would not have had to be convicted of drug charges to have his property taken away, because drug forfeiture is a civil matter.

On criminal drug charges, the state would have to prove Foster's guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt." In most civil cases, however, a defendant can be proven guilty on "preponderance of the evidence" - the fact there was more reason to believe he was guilty than that he was innocent.

However, Christensen said under the drug forfeiture laws at the time the civil case was tried, a defendant could be proved guilty on "probable cause."

That means in order to keep Foster's property, his heirs would have to prove Foster's innocence beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christensen said the law was amended in August, requiring future drug forfeiture cases be handled based on preponderance of the evidence. However, she noted, the change was too late to affect the Foster case.

She added Foster's case itself never went to trial, because his heirs agreed to a settlement.

Such actions by the federal government not only raise questions about why Foster was charged, but why he died. Some suggest he was killed because developers wanted his property.

"I've been told by people all over the city that Joe Foster was not only killed for his property, but because he had the power to protect people from being displaced and from having their property illegally confiscated," said Mingo.

Mingo said she heard she heard Foster "was a native of the city, he had the money and friends in high places that would protect poor people. He protected them all those years he was alive."

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Archer gives away Detroit and strips away democracy

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

01-06-2001

Archer gives away Detroit and strips away democracy

The year 2000 started with a controversy over the city of Detroit giving up an important part of its heritage - the Grand Army of the Republic building- to businessman Mike Illitch for the purpose of private profit. Detroit legal advisors said Detroit City Council members committed themselves to the sale without realizing this was what they were doing.

The issue is still in doubt. City Council may declare the building an historic landmark, which could prevent corporate interests from being too crass about the way they use it.

Still, the issue seemed an appropriate example of how Detroit Mayor Dennis

Archer's policy of giving away the city to corporate interests (and City Council members' blind acceptance of it) has undermined government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Influence peddlers continued to get politicians to sell city land without competitive bidding. Robert Slattery, Detroit's corporate welfare king, got a second piece of tax abated located in the city's enterprise zone, with the support of an "in group" of well - connected organizations whose members grabbed up land themselves: the Brush Park Development Corporation, the American Red Cross, Hospice of Michigan.

Evidence indicates the University Cultural Center Association served as an unofficial lobbyist for Slattery's project, and there are questions about how much of the organization's lobbying was done with state funds.

The Archer administration is considering giving a second plot of east side land without competitive bidding to Graimark, where his son works as director of business development, and with whom both his son and sister in law have a pizza franchise partnership.

Graimark also stands to win a substantial contract for the newly-approved Kmart deal, which went through against the wishes of some residents.

Council President Pro Tem Maryann Mahaffey, widely seen as a progressive city official, has given her support to both Slattery and the Kmart project. To some that seemed the unkindest cut of all.

Later in the year, in the case of Nathaniel and Annie Jackson, Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Michael F. Sapala made a ruling suggesting the State Legislature has the right to restrict the court's power to protect property right to the poor.

Sapala declared under state legislation, as soon as the mayor and five out of nine members of the city council declare taking someone's land "necessary" for "the public good," courts have no power to question that judgment. He added property owners can keep their land only if they can prove beyond a reasonable doubt the city committed fraud, error of law, or abuse of discretion.

In October, there was an incident reminiscent of life in a totalitarian state. Gwen Mingo, chairperson of the Brush Park Citizens District Council, was arrested on the way to a district council meeting, where Detroit Planning and Development Department director Paul Bernard was scheduled to face citizen complaints and district council lawyers were supposed to map out a legal strategy for a suit against the city. Mingo was arrested and held over seven hours for alleged traffic violations.

Incidents of police brutality and police shootings continued to fill the news not only in Detroit, but throughout the country. Driven by the outcry, Archer himself asked the U.S. Justice Department to look into the issue.

However, in a recent gathering Archer's Police Chief Benny Napoleon reportedly promised to go after the people who wrote negative things about him. After providing an example of human right violations, Archer was

elected December 9 as president of the National League of Cities.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Detroit City Council shuts community out of debate

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

09-29-2001

Detroit City Council shuts community out of debate

DETROIT -- Detroit City Council denied residents of Brush Park a chance to voice their views September 13 as it discussed revisions Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer's Administration wanted in the development plan for their community.

"You're not scheduled to be heard today," Councilwoman Brenda Scott, who served as chairperson of the day, told representatives of the Brush Park Citizen District Council. "But I'm delighted that you're here so we know what is going on."

"How can you know what is going on if the people in the community cannot speak?" a member of the audience asked.

After the meeting residents said officials in the Archer Administrations Planning and Development Department (P&DD), who Scott did allow to speak, gave the Council misleading information.

Brush Park resident Edith Woodberry said, "I think they're trying to do more Black removal to build houses for people with money."

P&DD Project Manager James Marusich, claimed the new development plan would not involve taking any occupied houses, unless they interfered with "the right of way" for new projects including roads.

Woodberry said this would allow the city to take her apartment in order to build an addition to the Fisher Freeway "that is not going any place." She said the Archer Administration was also pushing the state for a 35 mile per hour zone, which would require demolition of houses.

Marusich said the revised P&DD plan would set aside 20 percent of the housing for low and moderate income people.

City Planning Commission director Marsha Bruin explained that the 20 percent would not involve every project, but the area as a whole.

Attorney Edward Kirkheim who is representing the CDC in a court suit, said,

"It's only a goal. There's nothing requiring any development to meet it."

Kirkheim said moderate income housing is defined so high the original

residents of the area could not afford to live there.

He said he knew of no low income housing planned for the area, except for senior citizen housing that might be put in the middle of the project.

Scott was not available for comment and did not return phone calls.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Terrorism drove people from Brush Park

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

11-10-2001

Cleveland "Terrorism drove people from Brush Park"

DETROIT -- Brush Park residents told members of Detroit City Council Oct. 25 Mayor Dennis Archer's Brush Park modified development plan codifies the city's efforts to drive Black people from their homes and give them to developers and suburbanites.

Resident Edith Woodbury said helicopters from the sky were involved in the destruction of homes, which were supposed to be preserved as historic structures. The fire department, she added, did not respond. "I think someone ought to go to jail for it," she said.

Councilman Clyde Cleveland agreed with Woodbury. "Terrorism was used [by

city government] to drive the people out," Cleveland said. "There were fires at night."

Noting city bulldozers tore down the house of Dr. Barbara Womack, Cleveland said, "I was there. I saw it."

In urban renewal programs, where the government forces owners to sell their land, the government is required to provide relocation assistance.

Jim Marusich, Brush Park's Project Director for the Archer Administration's Planning and Development Department (P&DD) said the old development plan called for relocating 514 people. The new plan called for the relocation of 30.

Council President Pro Tem Maryann Mahaffey asked, "How many have given up [and left the area before relocation was provided]."

"I know for a fact we did not get our relocation money," Betty Clark responded.

"I was relocated three times and haven't received a dime.

I'm not qualified to move back," Bobbi Heard said.

Under the new plan there is no provision to relocate residents.

Marusich said the plan stated no occupied house would be acquired by the city unless it was needed for right of way improvements. He said only one house would be taken, an apartment belonging to Woodbury, who is challenging it in court.

Marusich did not say anything in the modified plan would prevent the city from adding more public right of ways in the future.

The Brush Park Citizens District (CDC) oppose the plan.

City Planning Commission director Marsha Bruhn said developers and the Brush Park Development Corporation "all support the plan" and were "very active" in forming it.

Bruhn, when asked, admitted no one in these organizations was elected by the residents of the area or was authorized by state law to participate in the planning.

Woodbury said the Archer Administration violated State Act 344 which mandates the CDC to be "involved in every aspect of the planning."

According to Woodbury, P&DD already formulated their own plan before they consulted the CDC.

Some suggested those supporting the plan were developers or new residents who benefited from the fact the people were moved out.

Mahaffey said, "I want to hear from the residents who have [originally] been there and not Johnny come latelies."

Cleveland said the city got \$500,000 from the federal government, but the money was used for other purposes.

While several developers claimed 20 - 40% of the housing built would be

"low and moderate income," Amen Ra Heru representing the Detroit Council of Elders said as the government defines these terms the incomes of the residents "would not come near that amount."

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Brush Park heroes honored

Long-Bey, Jesse

Michigan Citizen

11-24-2001

A coalition of groups protesting the Afghan war Nov. 10 at New Bethel Baptist Church honored local residents battling to save their community.

EMU Professor Charles Simmons, a member of the Committee for The Political Resurrection of Detroit, presented an award to Brush Park Citizen District Council President Gwen Mingo. "We pay tribute and honor to the residents of Brush Park in their courageous fight to defend their land, homes and families from the bulldozers of the big developers and the trickery of politicians," Simmons said.

Residents of Brush Park, an area located near downtown Detroit, have accused outgoing Mayor Dennis Archer's administration of driving them from their homes so suburban developers can build expensive townhouses in the area located just north of Comerica Park. Several unsolved murders and a number of mysterious fires have given credence to the allegations.

Simmons said Mingo, imbued with the spirit, of Ida B. Wells, Sojourner Truth, Mary McCleod Bethune, and Rosa Parks, has struggled for many years

to bring truth and justice to the residents of Brush Park. "In this effort, Sister Mingo has been arrested and imprisoned, some residents have been killed, and many residents have had their homes taken and have not been given the resources to find decent living arrangements," Simmons said.

The Teach-In at New Bethel was organized to discuss the struggle for human rights abroad and at home. The church has a history of lending itself to groups fighting for freedom.

It was a focal point of Detroit organizing for the 1963 March On Washington. In 1969, it was the scene of a shootout involving the Detroit Police Department and the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Brush Park residents get reprieve on master plan

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

12-08-2001

Brush Park residents get reprieve on master plan

DETROIT -- Detroit City Council voted Nov. 20 to delay considerations of amendments to the current Brush Park Mater Plan which some residents charge will make their lives more difficult. The amendments were proposed by Mayor Dennis Archer's Planning and Development Department (P&DD).

Brush Park Citizen District Council (CDC) has accused the Archer administration of driving them from their homes and giving their property to developers and institutions. The delay will prevent the City Council from discussing the proposals until Archer leaves office, Mayor Elect Kwame Kilpatrick is sworn in and a newly elected City Council takes office.

Marsha Bruin, head of the council's City Planning Commission, recommended the delay. "I found today the master plan was never discussed with the CDC," Bruin said.

Council-woman Kay Everett said, "I want everybody to be fully aware [of what the master plan says] so no one can say we did not let them know."

Councilman Clyde Cleveland asked Bruce Evans, an official representing the P&DD, "Why are you having it here before it has been approved by the CDC?"

Evans said, "This [the master plan] doesn't go forward until the development plan does."

The Brush Park CDC saw the development plan and voted to oppose it.

Although the hearing was postponed till January, the council allowed Brush Park residents who came that day to speak.

Residents said the proposals to create high density housing would ruin the character of their neighborhood.

"I invested \$150,000 [in my property] to allow a developer to put up multi units in every part of the area?" Jesse Hill asked.

Hill said plans to turn one way streets into two way streets would allow outside traffic that doesn't belong there and has no interest in the community.

Edith Woodbury opposed designating certain Brush Park areas institutional as well as residential. "When you begin to put all kinds of institutions in, it will be easy for them to say Brush Park doesn't have to be a historic district anymore," Woodbury said.

Evans said officials wanted the institutional designation because a hospice had been approved years ago. He said he wasn't aware of any other institutions planned for the area.

Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel said the change in the master plan did not matter. "Before any institution comes in, the issue has to come back to us," Cockrel said.

However, in an interview after the meeting, Kathy Janiczek, a former Brush Park CDC chairperson, said designating the area institutional would eliminate a margin of safety for the community. According to Janiczek, Board of Zoning Appeals would no longer be involved in such decisions, leaving sole power in the hands of city council. Janiczek expressed suspicions Wayne State University had an eye on some Brush Park land.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

CDC tells Detroit 'Don't destroy Black culture, utilize it'

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

06-22-2002

DETROIT -- Residents from a near downtown neighborhood have developed a plan to revitalize their community and preserve its history.

The plan calls for the creation of a Brush Park Paradise Valley African American Historical Cultural Arts and Entertainment District.

The Brush Park Citizens District Council (CDC) adopted the plan at their May 28 meeting. Supporters said it would restore the spirit of the era of the old Black commercial areas of Paradise Valley, Hastings Street, and Black Bottom.

Dorothy Robinson, a Brush Park resident, who heads a theatrical group said the plan would create a place where people can experience Black culture, in the same way people can experience Mexican and Greek culture in Mexican Town and Greektown.

"We can put up specialty shops, jazz and blues clubs," Robinson said. "It will attract tourism."

Resident Edith Woodbury agreed. "I think people will come all over the country to Brush Park," Woodbury said. "Masses of Black people will come and white tourists will come."

The Detroit City Council's Planning Commission is studying plan. The city council will decide whether to adopt CDC recommendations or proposals made by Detroit's Planning and Development Department. Commission Director Marsha Bruin was unavailable for comment and did not return calls.

During the prior administration, Brush Park CDC charged P&DD proposals moved Black people out of their homes and gave their land to special interests. The group also said PD&D withheld and misused federal funds, which were supposed to help people rehabilitate their property.

Lona Reeves, publicist for the P&DD, said she could not comment on the CDC plan, because she had not received a copy of it.

Detroit Historic District Commission Director William Worden told the Detroit City Council several years ago government policies destroyed Black businesses by building the Chrysler Freeway in the middle of them. The CDC plan suggests there are parallels in P&DD's current plans to take property in order to widen the Fisher Freeway.

The plan quotes lifelong resident Douglas Fuller as saying, "I feel like they stole my life, history, and fond memories of my home, city, and neighborhood and removed all the Blacks and all evidence they were here. The little kids, they don't know the pride we had or how it felt."

"It was a high period in Black culture," Robinson said. "There would always be excitement and a variety of things going on."

"When we had anything, white people came to see it. They were not so prejudiced they did not enjoy Black entertainment. Sometimes it was so crowded we [Black residents] could not get in," Woodbury added.

The Coordinating Council for Community Rehabilitation (CCCR), representing most Detroit CDCs, voted June 3 to support the Brush Park CDC plan.

The CDC plan also calls for a federal grand jury investigation of city actions. It calls for the city to stop seizing property and demolishing Brush Park structures, to start paying relocation benefits to those who left the area, to give property owners the same access to urban renewal funds developers have in order to maintain their property and the same street light services as residents in the developments.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXI

Brush Park residents sent packing without relocation funds

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

09-07-2002

DETROIT -- As many as 800 people have been displaced from Brush Park without receiving relocation funds, according to a member of the community.

Betty Clark, a Brush Park Citizen District Council volunteer, said she has signed statements from 800 people displaced from Brush Park declaring they never received any of the benefits they were legally entitled to.

"The people have been pushed around and moved around," Clark said. "Some of them are homeless. Some of them are ill."

Orlanzo Harden may be one of the lucky ones. Harden found help from friends. However, he says his life is unstable.

"I'm here and there living with friends," Harden said. It bothers me very

very much. I don't know if it's going to work out. I'm very depressed. Very nervous."

Harden said when he was pushed out of his home; he lost his belongings, his jewelry, TV, bed, even his clothes and other things that were very important to me."

Being dislocated, he said, has also meant separation from his family.

My grandbabies are here and there," he said. "I hope I can be relocated. I want to raise them all together."

City spokesperson Lona Reeves said there is no office in the Brush Park area to relocate residents who have been displaced. Reeves said there is a general relocation office in the P&DD office downtown. A representative from the Relocation Office said it has only two employees and they service the whole city.

The Detroit City Council adopted a modified Brush Park development plan July 10, but failed to act on Brush Park CDC proposals to set up a relocation office in Brush Park.

The council rejected a CDC proposal preventing the city from taking any more occupied property away. Instead all nine council members unanimously voted to allow the city to take property when it was necessary for improvements and continue construction on a service drive for 1-75, which will also displace families.

The City Council also rejected the CDC proposal that relocation benefits be given to those who had left the area after urban renewal was declared P&DD

Publicist Sylvia Crawford said the final plan the council passed was the result of mediation in which the CDC participated. The plan did include five of the 43 revisions proposed by the CDC, but not the 39 others.

Marsha Bruin, Director of the council's planning commission said the adopted CDC proposals were not "substantive." She presented this as a legal argument that it was not necessary to hold a public hearing that Councilwoman Sharon McPhail previously promised.

Brush Park CDC Chairperson Gwendolyn Mingo denied either she or the CDC played any real role in the final result.

"We received no notification of the vote. The plan is an illegal document violating the urban renewal laws governing our community," she said.

Displaced Brush Park residents face legal delays, mysteries

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

06-14-2003

DETROIT -- The Wayne County Circuit Court postponed taking action on a suit filed against past and present residents of Detroit's Brush Park area from May 27 to August 25.

The suit claims city policies are forcing residents out of their homes in the area, which lies east of Woodward and north of Comerica Park.

Gwendoline Mingo, who chairs the citizens district council representing residents and business people in Brush Park, said this was the tenth time court action was delayed.

In the case file, there are no records of past postponements or why they had been made, but an employee said some records had been removed from the file. Asked who removed them, she said, "I cannot tell you that."

Shawn Neal, a lawyer who works for the Detroit Bar Association referral line, said it is unusual for records to be removed.

"There is a sign in the City County Building saying it is illegal to remove records from court files," he said. "As a lawyer, so far as I know, there are no exceptions to that."

There is also a question surrounding the suit's title, which is Gwendoline Mingo, individually and in a representative capacity, and Brush Park Citizens District Council, vs. City Of Detroit, a municipal corporation. Under the same case number there is also a case titled Brush Park Citizens of vs. Nagle Emilio, but it is not clear why.

Mingo said the delay was unfortunate.

"The postponement was very depressing to the people who waited so long," she said. "Their hopes were high because they were going to trial."

In a way, the delay also helped their case, Mingo said, because the legal team would have more time to find other people who were displaced, so that they can also join the suit.

Mingo said that more media attention was needed to draw these people out. She said the city claims there were 500 people in 1989.

"The community says there were at least six times that many people," she said.

Mingo said that on the negative side of the delay, there will be deserving people who will not benefit from the suit.

"There's a direct relation between the delay of justice and the loss of justice," she said. "People die. People are scattered and you can't find them. People sell their land at low prices, because they feel they have to leave anyway or because the roof leaks."

Mingo added that the delay might encourage some people to make separate deals to sell property to the city. And that, she said, would be a bad deal.

"By the time we get to court, they [city officials] will have a chance to cover up all the things we have in the complaint. With each delay, people lose hope," she said. "People become divided and they let others divide them and are unable to maintain the unity, which is their strength."

Mingo said she also regrets that the plaintiffs could not afford to file for injunctive relief, which would have stopped all land sales and transfers of financing while the court decided the case.

"Justice is often for sale," she said. "Justice, integrity and souls are often for sale in a struggle like this. I'm talking about the souls of some clergy, elected officials, governing organizations endowed in public trust, and some courts."

Mingo said she considers it a betrayal that the city council rejected the citizens district council's request for help in stopping the city from forcing Brush Park people to sell their homes. The district council chair added that she believes the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development should cut off all city funds for that purpose, and get a grand jury to investigate city development policies.

William C. Silvis, a lawyer in the suit, said that Brush Park residents and property owners, who were in the area any time after 1989, may be eligible to join the suit. Those who are interested, he said, could contact the Wasinger, Kickham and Hanley law firm either by calling (248) 414-9900, or writing to 26862 Woodward Avenue, Suite 100, Royal Oak, Michigan 48067.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Historic Black Brush Park sites razed by city bulldozers

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

08-23-2003

DETROIT - The leader of the Brush Park Citizens' District Council again accused the Detroit Planning and Development Department Aug. 5 of illegally demolishing historic buildings on Brush Street on Aug. 4 and Aug. 5.

Among the structures that are gone forever is the original stand for City Cab, the city's first African American-owned taxicab company.

The chairwoman of the citizens' district council, Gwendoline Mingo, said local laws forbade the obliteration of the city's historic buildings. But, she said, P&DD officials wanted to get rid of the buildings to build condominiums in their place, so that rich people could move into the area.

There was an earlier wave of demolitions at the beginning of July, which claimed, among other structures, a historic building once belonging to the infamous Purple Gang. The Brush Park CDC is scheduled to go to trial Monday Aug. 25 to sue the city for destroying the community and the Brush Park historic district.

The citizens' council succeeded in convincing the Detroit City Council to stop the demolition for a while. City Councilwoman Joann Watson said she got the council to pass a resolution allowing the CDC to present its case after city council members came back from summer recess.

"As soon as the city council went into recess, they started tearing down the area," Mingo said of the P&DD. "It's like Pearl Harbor. Urban renewal has been a nightmare."

Watson said the community can ask for an emergency city council meeting but that would require the participation of at least four council members.

"They already have me," she said. "I'm not going anywhere."

A spokeswoman for the P&DD, Lona Reeves, said she did not know why the houses were torn down on Aug. 4 and Aug. 5 and promised to look into it. She said she still has not received information about the demolition that took place in early July.

Mingo called for an investigation by the FBI, the federal and state attorney general and the Wayne County prosecutor. She said that before the demolition, there was a "systematic pattern" of unexplainable fires and other assaults on the buildings, including the "plucking of ornaments to ruin the character of the houses."

Mingo said the buildings represented the history of Paradise Valley, a flourishing and famous African American business and jazz area.

"They try to kill you from the inside, just like they destroyed the buildings," she said. "They threw the people out, smashing them to the ground like they were a piece of trash."

Malik Shabazz, head of the New Marcus Garvey Movement and the Black Panther Nation, said he and members of his organization would go to Brush Park to show their support for the residents.

"People have to develop their own areas. We can't have the fat cats plan our neighborhoods, while their kids go to Harvard, Yale, and U of M and our kids get into trouble standing in the street," Shabaaz said. "At least there has to be a real partnership."

The Brush Park CDC case will be tried before Wayne County Circuit Judge James Rashid at 8:30 a.m. Monday, Aug. 25 in Room 1111 of the Coleman A. Young Center.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Residents say builder's negligence is health threat

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

09-20-2003

DETROIT -- Brush Park area residents' health may be gone with the wind, according to an inspector from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, because of the wording in federal regulations.

The City of Detroit is using MDEQ funds from the Clean Water Initiative to demolish buildings in Brush Park, which the area's citizens' district council wants to preserve. Gwendoline Mingo, chair of the area CDC, claims the city administration wants to get rid of houses that have been officially designated as historic, because it wants to give the land to a giant development company called Crosswinds. She also claims the administration wants to move current residents out and destroy evidence the community could use in a suit it is waging against the city in Wayne County Circuit Court. The suit has been delayed ten times in three years.

Richter's Contracting Company, which is handling the demolition for the state, had put up ribbons, announcing, "Danger Asbestos Hazard," around buildings it demolished at the northwest corner of Alfred and Brush.

When asked about it in an interview Sept. 3, Thomas Vincent, an MDEQ inspector, said that this was required because the company was unable to test for the dangerous asbestos substance.

According to federal law, he said, if a company doesn't perform such tests before a demolition, it has to take special measures and operate under the assumption that the structure does contain asbestos. One of these measures, Vincent said, is keeping the demolition area wet to prevent the asbestos

from spreading. Though he said the company was doing this, the ground appears dry in photos taken by The Michigan Citizen. On Thursday Sept. 4, the ground was also found to be dry.

When asked about this, Bridget Morse, staff scientist for Enviro Matrix, hired to handle the air monitoring of the demolition, contradicted Vincent's statements.

"We didn't have to wet the ground, because there is absolutely no asbestos," she said.

When asked why there were ribbons around the site claiming there was an asbestos hazard, she replied, "They are just there to keep people from going in."

In an interview Monday Sept. 8, Vincent revised his statement, claiming federal regulations only require that the land be wet when debris from the demolition is being moved around. Asked whether the wind could have any bearing on the matter, Vincent admitted that it could, but said that the law did not cover such circumstances.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Fire Department suspects arson in new Brush Park fire

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

09-27-2003

DETROIT - A second alarm fire broke out in the early hours of Monday Sept. 15, destroying two buildings in the city's Brush Park development area.

"It is suspicious," Lee Moore, a spokesman for the Detroit Fire Department said.

Moore said the cause of the fire could not be determined until the fire was put out and police could investigate it. He said the fire started around 3 am Monday Sept. 15 and was still burning in the afternoon.

Gwendoline Mingo, who chairs the citizens' district council (CDC) representing Brush Park residents, said the fire was still burning late Monday evening.

Homeless people, she said, sought shelter in one of the vacant buildings after being displaced by city development projects over a year ago.

"They had barely escaped with their lives," she said.

Mingo said that she had received tips about possible arson in the area and asked police for increased surveillance prior to the fire.

She said the two structures that burned down were 234 - 236 Alfred and 228 - 232 Alfred, both apartment buildings of over 50 units. Mingo said the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) was using Clean Michigan Initiative Funds from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to demolish them.

Mingo said that before the fire, she had personally called MDEQ informing

them that the demolition of these and other Brush Park buildings violated environmental standards by releasing asbestos into the air.

"An employee named Mr. Christmas promised to respond, but to my knowledge, because of the fire, the investigation never took place" she said.

"These buildings were so well constructed," she added, "the walls had 4 to 5 layers of brick. Most had been set on fire five or more times, but did not burn down. However, according to witnesses this time, the fire started burning everywhere at once."

When asked if she had any idea who might have set the fire, Mingo answered with a question: "Who would benefit from setting the fire?"

Mingo said the city approved giving the land to Crosswinds Communities to build apartments and sell them at a starting price of \$175,000, after Mingo's CDC had recommended the buildings be fenced, secured and renovated for housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people.

Mingo said the buildings were of historic significance because of their Italianate structure and the fact that they were built from 1845 to 1885. There was also some personal history involved. Mingo said the people in the community particularly wanted 234 - 236 Alfred to survive in memory of Grace Davis, a woman respected throughout the city for helping people, and who was known as "the mayor of Alfred Street." At Davis' request, her ashes were strewn outside the building she managed for 40 years in a special ceremony by her children and the tenants. The building was the scene of evictions last Easter, the day after the ceremony.

Mingo said the community fears that fires might be set in other Brush Park

buildings with the same historic qualifications, buildings like 64 Edmund, 216 Winder, 227 Adelaide and 261 Alfred.

"The city owned similar historic buildings - 54 Alfred and 103 Adelaide - and they were burnt down and demolished," she said.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Flying asbestos threatens Brush Park

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

10-04-2003

DETROIT - There is more evidence that the Detroit Planning and Development Department is using state environmental funds from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality in ways that threaten the environment.

P&DD is using MDEQ funds to demolish buildings in the urban renewal area of Brush Park. The project, paid for with state environmental funds, is threatening people's health.

"The community continues to complain of breathing problems," Gwendoline Mingo, chair of Brush Park's citizens' district council, wrote in a Sept. 11 complaint to the MDEQ, in which she blamed the problem on "the reckless abuse of environmental standards."

According to the National Safety Council, a leading advocate for safety and health, many types of building products and insulation materials made before the 1970s contain asbestos. The buildings being demolished in the Brush Park area were built much earlier than the 1970s.

Thomas Vincent, an inspector with MDEQ, said his inspections found that the Richter Contracting Company, which is handling the demolitions, followed the regulations that govern demolitions. But he also suggested that the regulations themselves may not fully protect people.

In a Sept. 3 interview, Vincent said that before any building is demolished, a company usually has to test for the dangerous substance of asbestos. If it does not, he said, the company has to take precautions that assume there is asbestos. These precautions include wetting the ground at the demolition site to prevent the possible asbestos from spreading.

On Sept. 4, The Michigan Citizen found that, at one of the demolition sites, the ground appeared to be dry. On Monday Sept. 8, Vincent revised his statement, claiming federal regulations only require that the land be wet when debris is being moved around. When asked, the inspector said that some of the debris might be blown around by the wind, but that federal law did not cover such circumstances.

On Thursday Sept. 19 The Michigan Citizen photographed people looking for the bricks in the rubble of a demolished house at Brush, just north of Watson, while the ground was dry.

Vincent said those involved may have been homeless people rather than employees of the demolition company.

"People in the Richter Company say they have seen homeless people trying to take bricks," he said, "but the police have refused to take action."

If the building does contain asbestos, people rummaging through the debris

are potentially exposing themselves to a danger to their health. Around the site, there were no signs or ribbons put up to warn community residents of possible asbestos in the area.

Vincent promised to look at the site to determine whether or not the people moving the bricks worked for the demolition company.

But Mingo, in an interview, said that the people observed on the site did work for the company.

"They weren't street people," she said, adding that the people in question appeared to be under the supervision of others who were at the site.

In her statement to MDEQ, Mingo protested the fact that the buildings were demolished at all.

"There has been no public purpose to demolish these properties other than to turn the land over to certain developers at no cost or low cost," she wrote. "We believe it is criminal, outrageous, and an abomination for Clean Michigan to use government funds, taxes -- or any other type of funds -- to pay for demolition for rich developers and assist them in destroying a historic district."

The press secretaries of several different officials were asked why, at a time when people in so many Detroit neighborhoods were pleading to have vacant houses torn down, state funds were being used to demolish houses in the one area that did not want it. They passed responsibility to those at lower levels.

Liz Boyd, a spokeswoman for Governor Jennifer Granholm, said the

demolitions were a matter for MDEQ.

Patricia Spitzley, a spokeswoman for MDEQ, said, "The City of Detroit prioritizes what is torn down with tax dollars. The residents should go to the mayor."

But Howard Hughey, a spokesman for Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, said the mayor did not even know what P&DD was doing with state environmental funds in the first place.

"It's not a mayoral issue," he said. "The P&DD submits their plan for making the city cleaner. The mayor has perfect confidence in those he put in leadership positions. It doesn't go from the top down. It comes from the bottom up."

A P&DD spokeswoman, Lona Reeves, promised to provide her department's position but was unable to do so by deadline.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Brush Park burns again, Mingo asks feds for help

Ron Seigel

Michigan Citizen

10-18-2003

DETROIT -- On Monday Oct. 6 a second fire hit two historic buildings in the urban renewal area and historic district of Brush Park -- 234 - 236 Alfred and 228 - 232 Alfred. The buildings suffered a previous fire Monday Sept. 15, which the Detroit Fire Department officials called a "suspected arson."

Gwendoline Mingo, chair of the citizens district council (CDC), called on the federal government to provide guard service to protect the buildings and to have the guards under the CDC rather than the city. Such an arrangement was established in 1969 and through the early 1970s for the Research Park urban renewal area under former Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh and Roman Gribbs.

The week between the first fire and the second Mingo said she wanted city surveillance over these and other vacant buildings. She listing those which she warned might be in most immediate danger.

She said she feels the most immediate targets will be property owned by the late Joe Foster, killed in an unsolved murder at the beginning of the Brush Park redevelopment in the 1990s.

Although Chief John Tucker of the department's arson squad stated the Sept. 15 fire remains a "suspected arson," the Fire Department will not investigate it. Tucker declared the fire has not been investigated because it is hazardous and unsafe.

Mingo said Brush Park residents "live in fear of Devil's Night every night."

Judge to Brush Park residents Get a lawyer

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

11-08-2003

DETROIT -- At an Oct. 23 court hearing, Wayne County Circuit Court Judge James Rashid said that, if citizens in Detroit's Brush Park urban renewal area are unable to get a lawyer by Thursday Dec. 18, he may stop their

class action suit against the city from going to trial.

Brush Park residents, property owners and the citizens district council filed the class action suit to prevent the city from taking their homes and their land through urban renewal. The suit also seeks compensation for displaced home owners and tenants.

Months earlier, Rashid rejected a city request to dismiss the charges, ruling the case had enough merit to go to trial.

At the Oct. 23 hearing, he said he might dismiss the case if the residents did not get a lawyer by Dec. 18.

But in August, Rashid allowed the residents' lawyer to withdraw from the case. The same judge allowed another lawyer, Stephen Wasinger, to leave the case less than a week before the trial was to be held.

Wasinger claimed he could not represent the residents because they did not trust him. The clients pleaded with Rashid to make Wasinger continue the case. But he let Wasinger go and adjourned the case for two months to give the residents time to get a new lawyer.

When Gwendoline Mingo, one of the parties in the suit and chair of the citizens district council, mentioned that fact during the hearing, Rashid said, "The only issue is getting a new counsel. I'm not going to be inclined to adjourn it again, if you don't have a lawyer."

Rashid said that people could pursue their own case on an individual basis.

In response to Mingo's concern that the residents could not individually

afford an attorney, Rashid said, "Individuals don't have to be represented by an attorney. A class does."

Rashid also gave the city more opportunity to tear down buildings that played a major role in Detroit history.

Rashid denied Mingo's request for a temporary restraining order preventing the city from demolishing historic houses in the area. She was told only an attorney can make such a motion in a class action suit.

The residents' previous attorney said his reason for leaving the case was his unwillingness to make a motion to stop the city from demolishing the buildings.

Noting they were city-owned, Wasinger had said, "We can not prevent someone from tearing down their own buildings. If we tried to, we would lose credibility."

But Mingo said the Detroit Historic District Ordinance explicitly prevents property owners from destroying historically designated houses. When she attempted to file a motion on her own, Wasinger said it demonstrated a lack of trust in him and claimed the "attorney client relationship" was ruined.

Wasinger's own actions as attorney for the Brush Park citizens caused Rashid to get the case in the first place. The case originally went before Judge, William J. Giovann. Giovann withdrew, because Wasinger signed a petition for a rival candidate and his wife was passing around the petition. In explaining the reason for his withdrawal, Giovann said Wasinger's actions might raise questions about whether Giovann was prejudiced against him and whether he was capable of being impartial in the

case.

When asking Rashid to leave, Wasinger bolstered his case that there was a lack of trust between attorney and client by bringing up the one issue that was likely to prejudice Rashid. He noted the clients wanted to have Rashid disqualified as judge.

Mingo said the reason for that was Rashid's ruling in the case of Brush Park resident Gwendoline Washington trying to get possession of a theater. Wasinger himself, just before making the statement, declared his ethics as an attorney prevented him from revealing information about court strategy, but he brought out one of the most emotional issues possible.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Possible misconduct": Brush Park CDC says cut P&DD funding

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

03-27-2004

DETROIT -- The citizens district council representing residents and businesses in the Brush Park urban renewal area unanimously passed a resolution at its March 9 meeting calling for the elimination of all federal community development block grant funding for Detroit's Planning and Development Department (P&DD).

The Detroit City Council is now considering budget matters, including the way federal community block grant funds are going to be spent.

Carolyn Walker, who chairs the CDC for University City "A", stated her organization will consider making similar recommendations at its next meeting, Thursday, March 25.

The Brush Park CDC also called for an investigation of P&DD's "past activities." The city council's own lawyers in the Research and Analysis Division suggested the possibility of such an investigation in 1998 over activities regarding the Graimark Project. The Brush Park resolution suggested more recent P&DD activities represented "possible misconduct."

While the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) dispersing federal block grant funds has the legal mission "to move people from rental housing to home ownership," P&DD has used such HUD funds to take people's homes away. (HUD had taken away some funds from the Detroit Housing Commission last year on the basis that this institution violated HUD's mission statement).

While another part of HUD's mission is to "address the challenge of homelessness," P&DD has used funds for urban renewal programs which actually "render people homeless." At the very same time P&DD is seizing people's homes, the federal government has recently decided to limit the number of applications for section 8 funds providing rental housing. Any city council member "voting for any involuntary acquisition of citizen's homes at this time," the resolution said, "should be viewed a facilitating or endorsing genocide."

P&DD "misappropriated" HUD grants, which were legally supposed to be used for community and economic development and used them for its public

relations staff "to glorify and justify its actions," while "placing massive gag orders on the rest of its staff preventing them from giving spontaneous answers to the media." (P&DD staff officials say they are required to refer all media questions to the publicists.)

At the same time P&DD impounded HUD block grant funds legally allocated by the city for CDC staff and offices "that could have found out the truth about its activities and stop any department cover ups of its actions."

In addition, the P&DD has: -- been unable to account for some of the records it seized from CDC offices. "At a time when all neighborhoods are suffering from abandoned buildings," P&DD used "scarce state funds" to tear down building in Brush Park, and did so in a way "that threatened the health and safety of the area." In violation of state law, the P&DD kept from the University City "A" CDC a plan it presented to the city council for housing development at 57 Trumbull and 5805 Lincoln and failed to tell the city council about danger from lead and asbestos, possible accidents from the nearby Grand Trunk railroad, possible contamination from a nearby auto plant, and the possible presence of Cobex, a substance Canadian officials declared dangerous and banned from their country. -- Allowed the firm Aida, LLC, to get a quarter of a million dollars it requested to help restore three buildings for five elderly low income people in the Art Center area, then gave the company a contract obligating it only to finish one of the three houses it promised and prevent one of the senior citizens from having a rehabilitated apartment.

-- supported the company's bid for another development after it "flagrantly broke its word" on the first one, so it "can make more of a profit at the public's expense."

The CDC urged the city council immediately stop the city from seizing people' homes "at a minimum as long as the section 8 cutbacks [on rental subsidies] are in effect." The CDC called on the council to restore funding to all CDCs "so they can protect their areas." If P&DD continues to impound such funds, the resolution called on the city council to "reject all P&DD plans for the area, unless the CDC specifically requests it."

The CDC has asked both the city council and Governor Jennifer Granholm to "call a halt to any further use of state funds for demolition in Brush Park."

When informed about the resolution, P&DD's assistant publicist, Lona Reeves, said she would look into the issues raised. As of the deadline P&DD did not reply.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Attorney calls Brush Park policy segregation

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

04-10-2004

DETROIT -- Attorney Cynthia Gaither, a lawyer defending Brush Park area residents being displaced by city urban renewal policies, charged that the policies were promoting racial segregation.

Gaither, who has been representing the residents ever since their original lawyer, Harold Wasinger, quit last year, said she would add the charge to the original complaints.

Calling the plan a violation of state and federal law, she said, "The plan speaks for itself. It tells of segregation."

James Rhoades, attorney for the city, said, "It is an insult to the memory of Coleman A. Young to accuse the City of Detroit of racial segregation in the Brush Park area. Coleman Young was the best African-American leader this city has ever had. This slander against his name shall not stand."

Gaither conceded the Brush Park plan was originally formulated in 1989 when Young was mayor, but said she would not speculate on how much he was responsible for it.

The plan was put together by the staff of the Detroit Planning and Development Department, which had supported eliminating some policies Young maintained to protect urban renewal area residents, particularly getting rid of elections for citizen district councils. Attorneys for the city argued against policies he was identified with.

The attorneys filed a brief declaring the city could not be held accountable for not relocating displaced urban renewal area residents.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Brush Park CDC Chair wants investigation of historic homes destruction

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

07-24-2004

DETROIT -- Once there were historic homes on Brush Avenue that were supposed to be preserved. Detroit's Planning and Development Department destroyed them, using state environmental funds to do it, and now there are big gaping holes in the ground.

Gwendoline Mingo, who chairs the Brush Park Citizens District Council, says there could be asbestos flying around the community. She is calling for a city council investigation.

Instead of cleaning up the asbestos from the house as specified under state law, Mingo said, "We have seen workers put new soil on it to cover it up."

When Mingo raised similar complaints last fall, an inspector with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Thomas Vincent, said the Richter Contracting Company, which was handling the demolitions, followed appropriate regulations.

But Vincent later suggested the regulations themselves may not be adequate to fully protect people's safety.

When interviewed Sept. 3, 2003, Vincent said that before any building was demolished, a company usually tests for asbestos. If not, he said, the company must take precautions that assume there is asbestos, including wetting the ground at the demolition site to prevent possible asbestos from spreading.

But The Michigan Citizen, looking at the demolition site the next day, on

Sept. 4, observed that the ground appeared to be dry.

Vincent later revised his statement, claiming federal regulations only require the land be wet when debris is being moved around. He added that some debris might be blown by the wind, but said federal laws did not cover such circumstances.

Mingo said state historic district laws say the houses had to be preserved, but that the city neglected the buildings and then tore them down.

Under Detroit's Historic District Ordinance, if private homeowners treated their homes this way, they could face fines and imprisonment.

Such laws are supposed to be enforced by the Historic District Commission, but Mingo said the system is rigged, because the only staff member who gathers information for the commission, Christine Kierdorf, is an employee of the P&DD, the department responsible for demolishing the buildings. Kierdorf was unavailable for comment.

Mingo said the state historic body could not respond to these illegalities, because Kierdorf was an appointed member.

She also said P&DD wants to destroy the buildings and give the land to Crosswinds Communities, a private company seeking to build housing too expensive for the current residents to afford.

In the meantime, she said, legal safety procedures go ignored and residents' complaints about respiratory problems continue to grow.

"One resident, in her 80s, can hardly breathe," Mingo said. "My son, who

had his asthma cleared up, can hardly breathe. He has to use his inhaler again."

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

CDC head warns Brush Park lawns and trees are about to go

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

07-30-2005

Detroit -- Gwendoline Mingo, head of the Citizens District Council representing the Brush Park area, told the Detroit City Council on Wednesday, July 13 that the trees in front of her house and most of her lawn is going to be destroyed. This, she said, is the newest effort by the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) to harass Black residents fighting in court to keep their homes.

P&DD, she said, plans to cut down the trees in front of African Americans' homes on Edmund and Watson and fill their lawns with cement in order to make a parking lot.

"It is like something out of Twilight Zone," Mingo said, "or a legend where people are marked for destruction by the Angel of Death."

Mingo showed The Michigan Citizen red and green Xs on trees indicating they would be cut down, including those in front of her house. She claimed trees in from the homes of white people were slated to be spared.

She said the only way she and her family will be able to get into her home

is through the alley in back.

Mingo stated she and her lawyer were told about the P&DD's new plan at a meeting earlier this month. She claimed the development was illegal, because state law said all such plans had to be taken before the citizens' district council. She added at the meeting the City Council unanimously passed an ordinance saying the community should be involved in planning process from the very inception of it. The resolution was unanimously passed in 1998 to deal with the controversy over giving people's homes to the Graimark Company and was presented as proof the City Council would not allow the same tactics to be used again.

When asked about Mingo's charges, an assistant to the mayor's press secretary said he would have to look into the issue before making comments.

Two days after she spoke, Mingo charged some of the statements she made before city council were edited out of the TV cable program of the council hearing.

"This is against the City Charter," she said.

Council President Maryanne Mahaffey agreed, "It's supposed to be on cable."

She added, though, "If there is a problem, it was with the equipment. It's old and needs replacement.

Mahaffey suggested calling the Research and Analysis Division, which is in charge of the equipment. However, the secretary said that the only one who knew about cable programs was at a council meeting. He did not return calls to The Michigan Citizen.

Mingo expressed skepticism that the equipment would accidentally fail at the very moment when she was accusing high city officials with illegal conduct.

Among the accusations she made that did not make it onto the airwaves were:

-- she had documentation that former mayor Dennis Archer received information that the Illitch family was not going to build a medical hospice on the land just as the city was removing people from their homes and selling the land for a dollar for this "public" purpose.

-- that Kwame Kilpatrick's administration was defying state law by trying to eliminate Citizen District Councils representing the people in urban areas and replacing them with the city officials' own "cluster zones."

-- the firm Crosswinds Communities did not develop property the City gave it in 2002.

-- a statement by Mingo that "The whole community was given away without any benefit and any recognition of the needs of the people there or to represent their heart, culture and history, as specified in the 16 objectives [for the project] submitted to HUD. This swindled HUD out of \$30 million."

The final statement that did not make it into the broadcast was an especially harsh comment by Mingo that "It looks like they [city council] were the greatest pimps of all. They pimped poor people, old people and Black people to create a total community of segregation, building a playground for the rich."

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV

Low-income residents object to plans to build costly new homes in Brush Park



Michigan Quarterly Review

April 30, 2005 | Seigel, Ron

Seigel, Ron

Michigan Citizen

04-30-2005

For several weeks The Michigan Citizen has featured articles about what it means to be homeless. Meanwhile, residents of Detroit's Brush Park urban renewal area say city policy is what's causing homelessness in the first place.

At the April 12 meeting of their citizens district council, Brush Park residents unanimously opposed plans for the Belmar Development Group, LLC to build housing in their area.

The neighborhood runs just east of Woodward, from I-75 on the south to Mack Avenue on the north.

"People have already been displaced by the [urban renewal] program," Warren Gaither, a district council board member, said.

But Dwight E. Belye, representing the development company, said, "There's a [government] requirement for [having the company build] low- and middle-income housing."

He said the cost of the new houses would start at \$120,000," drawing laughter from many residents, who said they couldn't possibly afford that.

Gregg Moots, representing the Detroit City Planning Commission, which advises the Detroit City Council, said the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the state set the guidelines defining low-income housing according to the average income in the county.

The chair of the Brush Park Citizen District Council, Gwendoline Mingo, said such rates do not reflect the income levels Brush Park residents, most of whom were removed from their properties over the years to make room for new, more expensive property.

Article copyright Michigan Citizen.

V.XXV