Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Devon Coleman <dcgems202@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2026 1:34 PM
To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: Case No. 26-RE – Supplemental Submission of Devon Coleman: Displacement at Brookland Manor (Saratoga Avenue NE)

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Members of the Zoning Commission,

My name is Devon Coleman, a Ward 5 resident, tenant, and community advocate. At the October 26 racial equity roundtable, Commissioners asked to hear from residents who have experienced displacement. I am sharing firsthand accounts from Brookland Manor on Saratoga Avenue NE, including from members of my own family and from neighbors.

WHAT RESIDENTS EXPERIENCED

Residents were told there would be a plan for them. For many, it never arrived. Some received no new home, moving help, or compensation, and still rely on relatives and friends for a place to stay. Promises about moving and returning changed. Notice was short, seniors were left on their own, and some families left DC for good. Demolition has happened in phases beside occupied buildings, and residents described dust and debris reaching their homes and blocking air vents.

One resident in contact with Councilmember Elissa Silverman's office attended a meeting on the redevelopment where progress was described as going according to plan. He spoke up to say residents were not getting the information or help they needed. Councilmember Silverman's office may have more detail.

WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS, AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

Brookland Manor had about 535 apartments, including 373 project-based Section 8 units. The approved plan calls for 1,760 homes, so replacement units are about 21% of the total. The Court of Appeals noted that the approval did not guarantee voucher holders a return at rents they could afford (Elliot v. D.C. Zoning Commission, 2021). I found no public record of where families went or whether they came home. The promises exist on paper. What happened to the people is missing.

A CITYWIDE PATTERN

DC was once proudly called "Chocolate City," and U Street was "Black Broadway." Urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s demolished almost every working-class home in Southwest. A 2019 National Community Reinvestment Coalition study found DC had the nation's most intense gentrification from 2000 to 2013, with more than 20,000 Black residents displaced. In Ward 8, Barry Farm residents were relocated and their homes demolished in 2019. The first new building, with about 70 units set aside for

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former residents, did not open until 2024, and full completion is years away. This affects renters and homeowners in every quadrant.

I welcome new neighbors and love seeing DC grow. I want people who look like me to still afford to live, shop, and belong here.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COME FIRST

In Southwest, new housing now stands beside a former power plant site that is still under environmental review. That testing should happen before development, not after, and every neighborhood deserves the same standard. Air, water, and soil do not stop at ward lines.

RIGHTS RESIDENTS DON'T KNOW ABOUT

DC's Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) gives a tenant association the first chance to buy its building when it is sold, or to negotiate for repairs and affordability. But that right only works if tenants know about it and can organize. In my own building, simply securing a room for a tenant meeting took weeks and help from several offices. Meeting notices often live online or on flyers many residents never see. When DC needs to reach residents about an emergency, it sends mass alerts. Plans that can move families out of their homes deserve the same urgency.

WHAT I ASK THE COMMISSION TO DO

1. Count who lives there first: renters and homeowners, household sizes, needs, and existing conditions.
2. Explain every option in plain language: to return, to relocate with fair compensation, or to organize under TOPA.
3. Put return promises in writing: rent, unit size, and terms based on each family's needs at the time of return, with or without a voucher.
4. Make relocation help real: advance notice, moving assistance, a named contact, and extra support for seniors and people with disabilities.
5. Test and protect before building: environmental testing before approval, plus dust, debris, and air monitoring during construction.
6. Support tenant organizing: require TOPA information, meeting space, and connections to legal and organizing help.
7. Meet residents where they are: door-to-door outreach, calls and texts, radio and TV, and schools, churches, and community groups.
8. Track outcomes publicly: who left, where they went, and who returned.
9. Study a DC "right to return" policy, like Portland, Oregon's Preference Policy, which has helped displaced families and their descendants return home.

Through The Upskilling Labs and Civic Tech DC, I am exploring ways to gather resident feedback and data on these issues, and I would be glad to share what I learn.

Thank you for listening to our stories.

Devon Coleman
Ward 5 resident