

Brookland Manor Redevelopment Zoning Hearing  
March 16, 2017  
Testimony of Kristi Matthews  
Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator  
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless

Good Evening, members of Zoning board and as well the community. My name is Kristi Matthews and I am the Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator for the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. I am here this evening to talk about my experience working with the tenants of Brookland Manor and what the current redevelopment plan from Mid-City Financial means for low-income communities of color. I will also talk about what your support versus your rejection the plan as it is currently drafted will say about your beliefs about these communities.

I have been working out at Brookland Manor with residents since April 2016. In August of 2016 while doing door-knocking for the community education meetings and talking with residents about the current redevelopment plan and their rights as tenants to fight that plan I was asked to leave the property by Mid-City Financial security guards or risk being arrested with other outreach workers, organizers, and lawyers. Not only is Mid-City Financial proposing a plan that will displace 100s of residents but also, at every turn the owner has attempted to block their basic rights to organizing and some may argue their basic human rights to information about decisions that will impact their lives. The process of being kicked off the property was not only demoralizing but also infuriating. Tenants were being showed that not only did the fact that they may face homelessness not matter but also it did not matter if they wanted to try and use laws to fight it. Capitalism trumped community at this moment and seems to trump community in every aspect of the plan for redevelopment that Mid-City Financial is leading to date at Brookland Manor.

The fact that the owner wants to build 1750 units of housing on this property and only wants to replace 373 units of affordable housing compared to our demand to replace all 535 units of affordable housing shows that at the root of this redevelopment plan is racist policies, ideology, and theories about communities of color as well as low-income communities. Like a wolf in sheep clothes this plan is being presented by the owner, some city officials, and others in the community as an affordable housing plan. But the truth remains that affordable housing is more of a causality than the purpose of the current plan. Less than a quarter of the 1750 units that Mid-City Financial plans to build in replacement of Brookland manor are marked to be affordable housing units, which shows those struggling to remain housed, looking for housing, or at risk of losing housing that their experience and needs are not the driving force of the current plan.

If any member of this zoning commission supports this plan as it is currently drafted, that can only be for two reasons, either that you yourself do not care about the lack of affordable housing that exist in DC housing market today or that you cannot see the wolf that is attempting to pass a plan as affordable housing that is actually is a plan to increase the cost of housing in this community. Regardless of the reason, ignoring the situation and letting this plan go through is making one clear statement to the community members currently living at Brookland manor as well as the 1,000s of community members looking for housing on daily basis in DC, you do not value, care, or respect their struggle. The racism and capitalism that is driving this redevelopment plan as it currently is drafted is not only obvious to us but should be to you as well. You have a choice to ignore this reality and vote with your eyes wide shut and support this plan as it is currently proposed or vote with your eyes wide open and reject this plan as it is currently drafted. It is important that you understand voting in support of this plan as it is

currently will mean one thing for these communities as well of those of us who are organizing and advocating daily for affordable housing that you stand in our way and not on our side. We will keep fighting, we will keep demanding, and we will win this fight. I hope you choose community over capitalism, equity over racism, and people over profits when you vote on this plan today. Thank you and I welcome any questions.