

Testimony of Erin Shields, on behalf of Bread for the City

Good Evening Chairman Hood and Commissioners,

Thank you all for allowing testimony on this very important topic: development of the Bruce Monroe temporary park into mixed income housing that includes replacement public housing units for Park Morton residents. My name is Erin Shields and I am a Community Organizer with Bread for the City. I am offering testimony on behalf of my organization, and the people we serve. As many here know, Bread for the City is a 42 year-old direct service nonprofit, offering food, medical, legal and social services to District residents living on low incomes. In order to combat the rampant displacement of native Washingtonians, Bread for the City has committed to fighting for the creation and preservation of 22,000 units of housing affordable to those living on the lowest incomes.

Today, I am testifying in support of the demand from Park Morton Residents—that the District use Bruce Monroe temporary park as a 'build first' site so that their property may be redeveloped in a way that prevents their displacement. It is no secret that historically, the New Communities Initiative and the DC Housing Authority have largely failed to redevelop public housing in a way that avoids mass displacement and disruption of entire communities. The privatization of public housing is dangerous, especially as we consider the very real fact that public housing is the most affordable housing option in the city. We must also consider, however, that this development could allow the New Communities Initiative to finally actualize its principles of both 'build first' and keeping public housing residents in their communities during redevelopment.

Oftentimes, the privatization of public housing leads to more stringent screening criteria for public housing residents who want to return after redevelopment. Former residents of Arthur Capper Carrollsburg, for example, are currently being subject to additional credit checks, criminal background checks and even housekeeping inspections when applying to return to the new units coming online now - over 15 years after being moved off that property. Recognizing many of the failures of the HOPE VI program, Park Morton residents along with other NCI public housing residents petitioned and testified at DCHA board meetings earlier this year and got DCHA to pass Resolution 16-06. A Resolution now applicable to all NCI properties that prohibits credit, criminal, or work requirement screening more stringent than DCHA's own standards. While DCHA has had conversations with residents and advocates indicating that the resident return criteria for the Park Morton replacement units will be created in conjunction with residents at a future date, nothing submitted by the Applicant in the zoning process thus far makes mention of or guarantees that Resolution 16-06 will be incorporated in the tenant selection and screening criteria for this project.

Over the past year I have gotten to know many people from the Park Morton community and have known them to be determined and fierce lovers of their community. Despite widespread intentional divestment at the local and Federal levels, public housing residents like many you have or will hear from today manage to build strong communities founded in love and mutual respect. Talking with residents, many understand the want from people opposing the redevelopment for green space in their neighborhood. However, this want cannot outweigh the need for affordable, safe, and dignified housing.

Too often, policy-makers look at development in communities of color as an opportunity to "create a new community." This concept fails to acknowledge the rich history and cultural norms that are easily found in these existing communities. NCI and other investments made by the city should aim to preserve and add to that community, rather than seek to disperse and replace it, by whatever means necessary. In order to minimize the displacement of public housing residents, we support the Commission approving the plans for the redevelopment of the Bruce Monroe temporary park, but would like to ensure that any zoning order include a provision that makes clear that the Applicant will adhere to DCHA's commitments in Resolution 16-06.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you all may have.

RESOLUTION 16-06

TO ADOPT RELOCATION AND RE-ENTRY POLICIES FOR NEW COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia established the New Communities Initiative (“NCI” or “New Communities”) in 2005 as a partnership between the District of Columbia (“District”) and the District of Columbia Housing Authority (“DCHA”), aimed at revitalizing several public or subsidized housing developments by leveraging both District and private funds to support redevelopment efforts;

WHEREAS, the DCHA communities currently targeted for redevelopment through New Communities are Barry Farm, Lincoln Heights/Richardson Dwellings, Northwest One, and Park Morton;

WHEREAS, New Communities was established with four key principles to guide redevelopment efforts – (1) One for One Replacement of existing affordable housing units to ensure there is no net loss of the existing affordable housing units; (2) The Opportunity for Residents to Return to the community to ensure that residents will have a priority for new replacement units and an Opportunity to Stay for residents of NCI communities where a Build First strategy is implemented; (3) Mixed-Income housing to end the concentration of low-income housing; and (4) Build First, which calls for the development of new housing to begin prior to the demolition of existing distressed housing to minimize displacement;

WHEREAS, redevelopment in all NCI neighborhoods assumes the demolition of existing distressed housing units and the relocation of residents, temporarily and/or permanently, to alternate housing units;

WHEREAS, NCI is committed to the success of every resident, and that every resident has the opportunity to thrive as a valued member of a new mixed-income community, has a clear and realistic path to return, and is offered the support to do so;

WHEREAS, establishing a strategy for relocation and setting specific standards for return would affirm a Right to Return as an important principle for New Communities developments and support resident success;

WHEREAS, this resolution will apply to New Communities Initiative redevelopment of DCHA properties;

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NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia Housing Authority hereby authorizes the implementation and effectuation of a relocation strategy for DCHA residents relocating either temporarily or permanently from or within New Communities development that:

- (1) Establishes a clear date of residents' eligibility for right of return for each community, which shall be the date of the selection of a developer or master developer for the onsite parcel or any part thereof, or the demolition of the residents' units, whichever comes first, and shall apply to any person legally residing at the property at any point on or after this date. In anticipation of more residents being eligible for a right to return than the total number of replacement units, a priority system of re-admission will be developed by DCHA in consultation with residents and stakeholders, subject to the policies described in paragraphs (4), (5), (6), and (7) below.
- (2) Establishes guidelines under which residents are eligible to return to their original development or to another NCI development subject to availability, wherein (a) There is a clear on-lease/off-lease determination of all members of the household at the time of move-out to establish who is eligible to return; (b) The right to return is satisfied upon move-in to a redeveloped NCI property; (c) Eligible households' right to return will not be terminated by refusing a unit or units in a redeveloped property, however, that right will be subject to unit availability at their original development and the other redeveloped NCI properties; (d) Households are eligible to return to their original development until the stabilization of the final phase of the development of that property, subject to unit availability as stated in (2c) above; (e) If an eligible household is not able to return to their original development, they will remain eligible to return to another redeveloped NCI property, subject to (2c) above and subject to resident-established priorities as described in (8) below; and (f) Eligible residents have a right to a unit fits their household size based on DCHA rules about occupancy, and even if their household grows during the relocation period.
- (3) Requires notifications to residents about a temporary or permanent relocation be made following relevant Uniform Relocation Act ("URA") standards, beginning at the time that the developer or master developer is selected notwithstanding the approval of an application for the demolition and/or disposition application by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD"), or the demolition of the residents' units, whichever comes first, wherein minimum standards of notification include (a) a General Information Notice (GIN) to inform residents of the redevelopment project and that it will require them to vacate; (b) a Notice of Relocation Eligibility, which establishes residents' eligibility for assistance and includes referrals for replacement housing; and (c) a 90-day Notice to Move, which establishes the earliest date that a resident will be required to move.

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- (4) Maintains each resident's eligibility as long as they are not violating the terms of their current lease, and/or have not been evicted from DCHA housing, wherein a resident is not considered to be evicted until termination or eviction proceedings are complete, and involvement in termination or eviction proceedings does not effectively indicate eviction and is not sufficient to revoke their eligibility for return.

- (5) Bars the establishment of any minimum work or service requirements that are more stringent than DCHA policy in order to return to units supported by District or HUD subsidy.

- (6) Bars the establishment of any criminal background requirement more stringent than DCHA policy in order to return to units supported by District or HUD subsidy.

- (7) Bars the establishment of credit or drug screening requirements more stringent than DCHA policy in order to return to units supported by District or HUD subsidy.

- (8) Permits residents and stakeholders of the community to develop priorities for residents admitted to the community, with a first priority for former residents, subject to the policies described in paragraphs (4), (5), (6), and (7) above.

- (9) Requires adherence to URA protocols regarding appeals and grievances as of the date of the selection of a developer or master developer for the onsite parcel or any part thereof notwithstanding the approval of an application for the demolition and/or disposition application by HUD, or the demolition of the residents' units, whichever comes first, wherein residents are allowed to appeal in writing if they disagree with the determination of whether they qualify as displaced and/or with the amount of relocation assistance for which they are eligible.

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- (10) Establishes an intention to work with NCI partners, including the District, developers and other partners to provide relocation support that meets minimum URA standards as of the date of the selection of a developer or master developer for the onsite parcel or any part thereof notwithstanding the approval of an application for the demolition and/or disposition application by HUD, or the demolition of the residents' units, whichever comes first.

- (11) Establishes an intention to work with NCI partners and residents through an inclusive and transparent process to establish return preferences for each NCI community.

ADOPTED by the Board of Commissioners and signed in authentication of its passage the ____ day of March, 2016.

ATTEST:

APPROVAL:

Adrienne Todman
Executive Director/Secretary

Terri Thompson
Chairman

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGAL SUFFICIENCY:

Ken Slaughter
General Counsel