

Will 90% of families from our neighborhoods in "City for All" be wiped clean off the map?

One hundred and ninety seven neighbors sign letter urging Mayor Hancock to avoid catastrophic displacement

November 13, 2017

Dear Mayor Hancock,

Cc: Members of Denver's, City Council, and Members of Denver's Housing Advisory Committee

The Eleventh Hour has arrived for Denver communities facing imminent threat from involuntary displacement. Neighbors, city legislators, planners and investors are at a precarious crossroads where we must decide what kind of city that Denver will be for generations to come. GES Coalition agrees with the idea of the Mayor's housing plan, and there are many inspirational statements and goals made in this plan. We can appreciate that the plan framework is focused on serving people instead of only building housing units. However, we are distressed to report that the Housing Plan, without critical vision and leadership in times of crisis, will critically fail to meet the need of a majority of families across the neighborhoods, those who are most vulnerable to involuntary displacement. The power imbalance that exists in Denver's neighborhoods most vulnerable to involuntary displacement needs to be acknowledged; a critical change in vision can bring solutions that transform projects in which affected community members themselves are involved in the solutions that determine their own communities future and well-being.

We want to remind you that communities have great motivation and self-interest to stay in their homes-- please do not underestimate how motivated we are to preserve our collective self-interest to stay. And we want you to know the City of Denver does not take this risk alone. We urge you to risk seeing the vision where the biggest resource is already in communities-- the collective force of the many people who live here-- families who are motivated to stay. We must also stress that to match the magnitude of the crisis, the amount of investment needs to be dramatically increased, yet bigger investments are not always better-- investments should be dispersed equitably in small series of investments, including a shared inclusiveness to grassroots and community solutions. Housing solutions should not rely on mid to large-scale, profit driven investments that do not have agility to meet changing community need, and often preclude (and intentionally exclude) existing community partnerships and organizations. Housing people in Denver should be visioned through a service and community lens along with development. The "leveraging" of resources should include community ownership of solutions as a resource as well.

Last Wednesday, November 8, 2017, members of the GES Coalition attended a meeting with your Director of HOPE. The results of this meeting caused community member participants to feel that your administration does not take the health of our communities seriously. Not only did the question of: "Are the GES communities worth saving?" go unanswered, but our national expert and experienced partners were treated with disrespect and dismissed without being able to present the proposal and strategy at hand. This disappointing meeting also confirmed a suspicion wide felt in our community that your administration does

not yet see communities as part of the solution to the crisis that is so severely intersected with our self-interest, family health and well-being. Having hard working community members and partners be doubted and looked down on instead of supported showed a lack of comprehension of the complexity of these issues, ignorance to the potential of people coming together to solve issues, and arrogance that is too blind to be inclusive.

In Globeville and Elyria-Swansea specifically, we are living in the epicenter of a city and statewide housing crisis exploding in plain sight. What is not often discussed is that the crisis here in our neighborhood is an afterthought of billions of dollars of public and private investment concentrated across our neighborhoods, facilitated and funded in part with public investment by the City of Denver-- this means public spending of tax dollars is one of the primary drivers fueling the threat of our displacement. The impact of these investments on the speculative housing market means that the majority of families in both neighborhoods, both renters and homeowners, are rapidly being priced out of their homes, resulting in widespread interruption to family health and well-being, and disproportionately affecting people who are disabled, live on fixed income, and families from low income and communities of color. Preventing the crisis from becoming epidemic means keeping people in their homes, and requires agreeing that the families in our neighborhoods are worth it-- worth the cost to mitigate a solution that is proportionate to the amount being spent on Denver's economic development projects driving widespread threat of displacement.

We keep hearing you say that Denver is a "City for All", but what happens when the City of Denver's investment leveraging billions of public dollars drives a majority of neighbors from their homes? According to our recent survey report, 9 of 10 of our neighbors have only recently become-- in the words of Denver's Housing Plan-- "severely cost burdened" and "housing insecure", a rising threat since 2013 since public and private investment were initially slated for large economic development scattered through our neighborhoods. Today, with so few solutions in sight for those facing imminent displacement, it's difficult to believe how the idea that Denver is a "City for All" can possibly be true.

This is a hard reality to acknowledge and present even harder to ask. To prevent a major crisis of displacement, how much is the health and well-being of our families worth? Does the City of Denver believe that elderly, disabled, low income and communities of color are worth the investment? Or will nine out of ten families in our neighborhoods-- and their histories-- the cultural fabric you speak of-- be wiped clean from the map? We urge you to think of your impact on the future generations of the city, and who will be here to enjoy it. We urge you to take a leap of faith, and take bigger risks for the benefit of the people most affected by this housing crisis. Do not let the future of Denver's most vulnerable communities-- low income and communities of color-- die on your watch.

Since we last wrote to you six weeks ago, Denver's housing crisis brings great stress and gloom, yet our neighborhood support and allies have grown. We are not alone in this fight to stay in our homes-- and our struggle connects us to the struggle that communities are facing in the Northside, Sun Valley, Montbello, North Park Hill, Cole, Five Points, Whittier, Clayton, East Colfax, Villa Park, Barnum, Athmar Park, Ruby Hill, Valverde, West Colfax, Lincoln Park, Mar Lee -- and connects us to all communities in the Denver metropolitan area-- Commerce City, Aurora, Federal Heights, Westminster, Wheat Ridge, Arvada, Adams County-- where the most vulnerable communities are facing disproportionate threat of displacement.

Mayor Hancock, we continue to look forward for a direct conversation with you about the letter we sent six weeks ago with an invitation to collaborate on community-driven solutions to keep families in their homes.

We would love to express to you our ideas that have worked in other major cities to assist in slowing displacement of residents, and we would like to share our learning with you. This needs to be a direct conversation with you, due to the fact that your housing director clearly expressed a bias against the community-driven model that is being proposed not just by the community but my national expects that are working all across the country on the same issues that the Denver is facing. We refuse to give up-- there is too much at stake.

We also want to thank your other directors of the NDCC and the NWC, who remain supportive and open to see how a housing crisis requires the City of Denver to take new kinds of risks. And we also want to let you know we greatly appreciate the Office of Economic Development staff that has carefully listened to community partners, and worked to expand "Emergency" TRUA funds that are more inclusive and comprehensive than before. We congratulate the City of Denver and OED for this success.

As we drafted this second letter and public comment, we reached out across the communities and we deliver to you today this letter, and attached public comment to "Housing an Inclusive Denver" signed by over 50 community members standing collectively as GES Coalition. We are not discouraged by your silence. We would like to cordially extend a second time the invitation to come to our communities and join the conversation.

We are looking forward to your response,

Respectfully,

Written and signed by 50 neighbors and members of Globeville Elyria-Swansea Coalition Organizing for Health and Housing Justice on November 13th, 2017.