

April 124/2018

East Austin Leaders Propose Anti-Displacement Program to Honor MLK's Legacy

Call on Mayor and Council to Act Now to Stop Massive Gentrification and Removal of People of Color from the Eastside

On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Monday January 15, 2018 at 1:30 pm at the Montopolis Negro School, 500 Montopolis Drive, East Austin Community Leaders held a press conference to present a 6-point People's Plan to prevent further displacement of people of color from East Austin.

"We have a crisis. Thousands of people of color are being removed from East Austin by gentrification. We need specific programs now to prevent our displacement and save our communities," said Nelson Linder, President of the local NAACP.

"Stop studying displacement, and act now Mayor and Council," said Dr. Fred McGhee, housing expert and head of the Save Montopolis Negro School Coalition. "After 516 council directives that include multiple resolutions and half a dozen task forces, the time for study and talk is over in Austin." As Dr. King said, "There comes a time when silence is betrayal."

"CodeNEXT is NOT the answer to preventing our replacement by affluent newcomers," said Susana Almanza, head of PODER. "The solution is to enact specific programs that have worked in other cities: making major public investments in low income affordable housing (60% MFI and less) and restricting land use to prevent demolition and redevelopment of our neighborhoods."

"We call on the City to make its highest priority preventing our displacement from our East Austin communities, and put CodeNEXT on the backburner," said Nelson Linder.

The People's Plan is laid out in detail in 6 resolutions or draft ordinances that council can adopt and begin implementing NOW:

- Establish Interim Land Restrictions in East Austin to limit degradation of the fragile natural and cultural environment.
- Establish a Low-Income Housing Trust Fund. Overseen by a community body like in Denver, this fund would make public investments exclusively in low income housing.
- Use City Public Land in 2018 to create 2000 low-income housing units on 8 city properties.
- Implement an East Austin Neighborhood Conservation Program with Conservation and Historic Preservation Districts to restrict land use that have been successful in other cities.
- Enact Right to Return and Right to Stay Programs (like in Portland and Houston that help seniors and low-income residents stay in and return to their communities).
- Enact a local Environmental Quality Review Program to ensure environmental justice.

Dr. McGhee concluded, "The Big Austin Lie is that CodeNEXT and developers will save East Austin. The real answer is effective anti-displacement programs and public investments in low income housing."