



Durham C.A.N.
(Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods)
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Friday, February 14, 2020

To the Durham Housing Authority and its CEO, Mr. Anthony Scott,
To Mayor Steve Schewel, the Durham City Council and the Durham County Commissioners,
To all those that call Durham home; her citizens, corporations, and institutions in every societal sector,

In 1967, at a gathering of clerical and lay leadership at Riverside Church in Manhattan, New York, the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., sounded a national, clarion call to fierce urgency:

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

We, Durham Congregations, Associations, & Neighborhoods (Durham CAN), a similarly diverse group of faith leaders and citizens representing approximately 30 vital Durham institutions call for a “fierce urgency” in response to the deplorable conditions endured by Durham Housing Authority (DHA) residents.

In July 2019, we conducted a “Resident Inspection” with residents from the Hoover Road DHA community, took over 100 photos from half of the occupied units, and documented severely damaged roofs yielding dangerous leaks throughout properties, mold infestations, and gas leaks. While the recent evacuation of McDougald Terrace residents just months later did not come as a complete surprise to us, we were horrified that many of these conditions of neglect did come as a great surprise to leaders within DHA and City Hall.

We urgently call for three actions:

First, a re-prioritization of the City and DHA’s spending plan for the \$95 million affordable housing bond that *accelerates* the necessary funding investments for deferred maintenance in all DHA properties in need of repair with CAN leaders, residents and community members at the design table and considering the redevelopment of Fayette Place as a potential resource.

Second, that the pilot of DHA’s eviction reforms – including rental assistance coordination, regular training of property management staff, and delays in eviction filings for non-payment of rent – be made permanent.

And third, that Mr. Scott fulfill the public commitments he made to CAN and Hoover Road residents to credit \$37,926 in court fees charged to DHA residents whose eviction filings were voluntarily dismissed in 2018 and 2019.

While the dangerous carbon monoxide leak in McDougald Terrace and the conditions at Hoover Road speak to an immediate state of emergency, there is a larger story to be told. The 60% unemployment of DHA residents, public transportation that yields multi-hour trips for employed DHA residents to their jobs, and the fifteen years of neglect of the Fayetteville St. sites still pockmarked by the broken foundations of the old projects testify to this long history of racial and social neglect. We all, even the highly concerned among us, are indicted by both of these realities.

This is indeed a time for fierce urgency. The leadership and membership of Durham CAN demand immediate action.

With haste and concern,
Durham Congregations Associations and Neighborhoods