

The People's Platform: A Roadmap to Achieving Racial and Economic Equity in the District

What is the People's Platform?

The People's Platform is a group of longtime D.C. residents, community leaders and organizers that seeks to educate and act for structural reforms that are needed to create a truly equitable city, where the economic, racial, and gender inequities affecting low-income people of color are eliminated. The People's Platform alliance believes we must come together to build our collective power in order to win the comprehensive policy victories that DC residents desperately need.

Political Context

In the last decade, we have witnessed a drastic change in the District. Thousands of luxury condominiums have been built; valuable community space has been lost and living-wage, unionized jobs have disappeared. The rich and wealthy in the District are benefiting greatly while many DC residents, particularly poor residents of color, continue to struggle to make ends meet. According to the Urban Institute, Black residents made up 65 percent of the Shaw and Logan Circle communities in 1990. By 2010, that number had decreased by 29 percent.¹ In terms of

affordable housing, there is no low-cost housing, defined as \$800 per month, available on the market. The only low-cost housing that remains in the District is subsidized by the government.² Furthermore, the wage gap in the District has grown rapidly. Hourly earnings for low-wage workers have increased by 7 percent in the last 35 years whereas hourly earnings for middle-wage workers have increased by 35 percent and 55 percent for high-wage workers. Unemployment among low-wage jobs is nearly four times as high as unemployment among high-wage job types.³ In 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics declared the District the most expensive city in the country.⁴

The District government has fully embraced a neoliberal agenda to the detriment of longtime DC residents. City officials have

1 Deirdre Bannon, "Mayoral tour highlights affordable housing," *The Current*, (May 2015): 3 & 16.

2 Wes Rivers, "Going, Going, Gone: DC's Vanishing Affordable Housing," *DC Fiscal Policy Institute*, (March 2015).

3 "Trends in DC Wages," *DC Fiscal Policy Institute*, (April 2014)

4 Demetrio M. Scopelliti, "Spotlight on Statistics," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (September 2014).

promoted privatization of public assets including public housing and shelters, disinvestment in social welfare programs, transfer of public ownership to private interests while calling for more investment in the police which has resulted in more surveillance and harassment of low-income neighborhoods and youth of color. While the city experienced record levels of homelessness, 13 percent, the District government gave away over \$200 million in taxpayer owned land.

Principles & Demands

In light of the current political context, we recognize that creating a truly equitable city will be a multi-year endeavor. The massive racial and economic inequities in the city are not the result of a single legislation and as such will require a comprehensive, structurally-oriented approach. The People's Platform is largely based on the idea of community control of public resources including land, housing and jobs. By exercising community control, DC residents will be in a better control of their lives and less likely to be displaced and exploited.

The People's Platform demands to see the following take priority in 2015:

- **The City must provide space for the development of a Black Worker Center in Ward 8.**

The Black Worker Center is a space for Black workers in the District to find creative, positive, dignified work and training. The Black

The city's investment in neoliberalism is apparent in the city council's continued reduction or exemption of taxes in exchange for corporations' relocation to the District, transfer of public assets like vacant city-owned lots, parks, schools to private interests, demolition of public resources like public housing, promotion of private development of housing, and reduction of living-wage and unionized jobs in exchange for low-wage service jobs.

Worker Center also serves as an incubation space for alternatives to low-wage work, such as worker owned cooperatives, collectives, and small businesses created, owned and operated by Black workers.

Black unemployment in the United States has been consistently double that of white employment since 1954, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics first started collecting data by race. Seventy percent of Black workers are employed in 5 industries and are concentrated in the lowest paid jobs in these industries. As of November 2014, the unemployment rate for whites in District was 4.9 percent while that of Black residents was 11.1 percent; more than double that of White residents.

Currently, there are several vacant government properties available, many of which are located in Ward 7 & 8. The unemployment rates in these particular wards, 11.6 percent and 17.7 percent respectively, are twice the overall unemployment in the entire city.

These communities would be best served by a Black Worker Center east of the Anacostia River.

➤ **The City must allocate funding for a city wide worker-owner cooperative training in the fall of 2015.**

Cooperative businesses are community-owned private entities that function democratically, generally following the principle of one member, one vote. Typically, worker owners distribute the surplus amongst them or choose to use the profits in another manner that benefits the business. Worker-owned cooperatives generate income, jobs, provide quality goods and services as well as economic independence. Worker-owned cooperatives provide more stable employment levels than other type of business model.⁵

The purpose of the training is to provide on-the-ground capacity to community-based organizations, non-profits and community leaders that are interested in supporting worker-owned cooperatives as tool for social and economic empowerment for low-income communities.

➤ **The City must strengthen First Source by increasing monitoring, oversight and enforcement mechanisms.**

5 Jessica Gordon Nembhard, "Benefits and Impacts of Cooperatives," *Howard University Center on Race and Wealth and John Jay College, CUNY*. (February 2014): 1-3.

The City must introduce claw back legislation, which will require any developer that receives public subsidies and fails to deliver on their promises of affordable housing and jobs to incur penalties.

For instance, the workforce development project at the Marriot Marquis demonstrates that job training programs are simply not enough. The Marriott Marquis received over \$200 million of taxpayer monies in exchange for a job training program that promised to hire primarily DC residents. However, out of the 719 trainees that completed the Marriott Marquis Job Training Program only 178 were hired, which comes to 26%. Clearly, 26% is well below the 51% that is required by First Source.

In 2007, the City of Los Angeles passed a First Source Hiring Ordinance (FSHO), mandating any business that receives public subsidies over \$25,000 with a term greater than 3 months to partner with the Community Development Department (CDD) in hiring LA residents, to track and make available their hiring numbers online. If the contractor is ever in violation of FSHO, the city has the authority to delay payment or terminate the contract. The District can adopt the FSHO as a model for enforcement.⁶

6 "First Source Hiring Ordinance," *City of Los Angeles*, accessed June 8, 2015, http://bca.lacity.org/index.cfm?nxt=sd&nxt_body=content_fsho.cfm

➤ **The City must establish a working group with ONE DC as a community partner in the pilot program for Parcel 42**

In 2002, ONE DC launched a campaign seeking the creation of permanently affordable housing on a vacant property known as Parcel 42. In 2008, Deputy Mayor Neil Albert promised to allocate \$7.8 million to the proposed development. In 2010, ONE DC members led a direct action where residents took over the land. Time and time again, city officials promised to create affordable housing on this property. Still, after many years the promise of deep housing affordability has never materialized. The history at Parcel 42 is clear indicator of failed government decision making structures.

In this regard, ONE DC should play a leading role in the pilot program for Parcel 42.

➤ **The City must place an immediate moratorium on all demolition and planned redevelopment of public housing. The City must invest \$100 million for the rehabilitation of public housing.**

The money allocated in the FY2016 budget is not enough. There are thousands of open work orders (unanswered/neglected maintenance requests) for public housing units in the city. It is customary for DCHA to neglect the maintenance and upkeep of properties they have identified to demolish. There is a record need for affordable units. DCHA is

allowing units to fall into such disrepair as to be uninhabitable. At a time when hundreds of families are in homeless shelters and the city is in a dire need for **more** units DCHA is constantly taking more units offline!

The amount of public housing units in the city has drastically decreased in the last 10 years due to redevelopment of properties into mixed income properties. The lost of affordable units has resulted in the rise of homelessness.

➤ **The City must introduce legislation that will protect tenants from displacement in buildings with expiring affordability covenants. The People's Platform must become a member of the working group that creates the legislation.**

Affordable housing in the District is quickly disappearing. Forty-five buildings financed through low-income housing tax credits and tax-exempt bonds have affordability restrictions set to expire in the next five years. Losing these affordable units will further exacerbate the housing crisis in the District. Many of these buildings are set in rapidly gentrifying areas, where owners have the financial incentive of opting out of these programs.

City officials have the opportunity to stem the tide of massive displacement by introducing legislation that will do the following:

- 1) Mandate that all housing providers provide notice of any and all potentially

- expiring subsidies exactly two years in advance of said expiration dates and every three months thereafter to all tenants
- 2) Ensure the initial notice of the expiration of subsidy shall give tenants the opportunity to purchase the building at a price and terms which represent a bona fide offer of sale

➤ **The City must place all current vacant properties into a community land trust, where a governing board comprised of longtime DC residents determines how the land is developed.**

A community land trust (CLT) is where a “title to multiple parcels of land, scattered across a targeted geographic area, is held by a single nonprofit corporation. These lands are never resold, but are removed permanently from the market, owned and managed on behalf of a place-based community, present and future.”⁷

There are over 250 community land trusts in the United States. Community land trusts have been excellent in promoting neighborhood revitalization without displacing residents. The Dudley Street Initiative is a great example

of collective ownership of land preserving housing affordability.⁸

CLTs acquire financing through a number of resources - federal programs such as HOME and LIHTC, private loans, local municipality support and leasing fees.

7 John Emmeus Davis, “Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States,” (2014)

8 “Dudley Street Initiative, Inc.” Dudley Street Initiative, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.dsni.org/dudley-neighbors-inc/>