

A Call to Save Affordable Housing at FD Haynes Gardens

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They have been threatened with losing the homes they have lived in for decades, but don't expect tenants of Frederick Douglass Haynes Gardens in the Western Addition to leave without an epic fight.

Tenants' first of several plans of attack is to seek the immediate disbanding of the nonprofit board of directors who are shockingly attempting to sell the development at 1049 Golden Gate Ave. to the highest bidder. Tenants are also calling for the complex to be put back in the hands of Third Baptist Church, which created the nonprofit and its board in 1969 with the sole intention of maintaining affordable housing in this city, not to destroy it as the current board is intent on doing.

To help achieve these demands, tenants are seeking support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development.

The current board has gone rogue. It is no longer making decisions to protect our city's most vulnerable residents, but rather to protect their self-interests and greed. After months of being told their apartments would not be sold, tenants of the Gardens were informed Monday – out of the blue – that their homes are indeed for sale. We also learned their units were marketed to buyers as potentially worth \$3,000 to \$7,000 in monthly rents, an impossible amount for current tenants to afford.

All of this was done through devious, self-serving means by the board. It met in secret, shutting out church leaders and neglecting to inform tenants. It did not schedule a single meeting with tenants regarding this massive decision that will significantly impact their lives. Just ask Betty Grace Evans, who moved there nearly 50 years ago, or Stephanie Brandon, a 26-year tenant who raised her two children in the complex.

Many of the complex's residents are Section 8 recipients. Many are elderly and disabled. But this board apparently could not care less. Bottom line, this is a nonprofit trying to make a profit, and what's more disgusting is many of the people they are targeting are their own -- African Americans -- who are now facing displacement by their own people.

The sale of this housing complex will have damaging impacts on affordable housing in a city that is seeing record rents almost on a daily basis.

The church is doing its part to intervene. We've filed a lawsuit against the nonprofit and are alerting the media to this brazen example of selfishness and injustice. Our lawsuit calls out the nonprofit for a number of offenses including dodging church oversight and inappropriately seeking to change bylaws to gain unfettered control of the Gardens.

However, we predict that more damning than our sound legal arguments will be the voices of condemnation from the people this nonprofit was designed to protect. This board will no longer be able to work in the dark while it sells out its own people.