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Low-income residents demand action

Newburgh - Low-income Newburgh residents descended on City Hall last Monday to demand that City officials address the low-income housing crisis through the Master Plan, which will guide development in Newburgh until 2040. Despite the downpour, high winds and hail that fell with the late afternoon storm, about 50 members of Community Voices Heard and their children marched from their office on Lander Street to City Hall chanting, "Brick by Brick, Wall by Wall, Build a City for us All!" Although the Master Plan was not on the agenda as originally discussed by City officials, marchers flooded into the Council meeting to send the message that they refuse to be left out of future plans.



Community Voices Heard held a press conference outside of City Hall, before marching into Council chambers.

Before marching into the Council chambers, the group held a press conference outside.

Brenda McPhail, a Community Voices Heard leader, explained why the group was marching: "The Master Plan, as it is now, doesn't include much of a future for our low-income families. We are here to demand that we have a voice in that plan and every plan they make for the future."

Community Voices Heard members say their goal is to get the City government to address the affordable housing crisis in Newburgh, where the majority of the population pays more than their means in rent and many families live in substandard apartments. Within the last 10 years, most of the public housing units have been sold, bringing many of the rents in these "low-income" developments near or at market rent.

Ianthe Dehaney is a resident of Mullins Apartments, the only public housing for families left in Newburgh. She has seen more and more families getting evicted, and worries that although she pays her rent without fail, the recent attack may affect her. "I worry everyday about the future, not knowing what will happen next. I always wonder: if I got put out of here, where would I go? Just because we're poor doesn't mean we don't deserve respect and a roof over our heads."

With development looming, including a 30 acre Waterfront Development deal, many longtime residents are worried that if their interests are not represented in the Master Plan, they will be pushed out of their city.

Maretta Melvin, a member of Community Voices Heard and a 50 year resident of Newburgh, said, "When I hear about what's going on today, my mind goes back to the days of Urban Renewal, when we had no choice to lose our homes. I wouldn't want anything like that to ever happen again."

After the press conference the marchers flooded into the City Council chambers. At the beginning of the public hearing on the tax exemption for Cold War Veterans, Ms. McPhail went to the microphone. Although Mayor Nick Valentine attempted to stop her from speaking on an issue other than that, she made a short statement, including "We are demanding that the Master Plan includes plans for real affordable housing before it is voted on." About 40 other members that we in the room then marched out chanting, "What do we want? Affordable Housing! When do we want it? Now!"

Community Voices Heard members had been meeting with City officials over the past few months to demand that protections for low-income housing are included in the 40 year plan, but have been told that they will not be added. They are asking the City to commit to addressing the needs of the low-income community in the Master Plan before it is passed.

Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a grassroots organization led and directed by low-income members. CVH is composed of 700 families in Newburgh, and has more than 20,000 members statewide, in New York City, Yonkers, and Poughkeepsie.