

AUSTIN WEEKLY *news*

New coalition takes aim at displacement

The Preserving Affordability Together Garfield Park Housing Coalition seeks to hold developers accountable

Thursday, May 7th, 2020 1:41 PM

By [Igor Studenkov](#)

Contributing Reporter

Even amid the stay-at-home order designed to slow the spread of COVID-19, the newly formed Preserving Affordability Together Garfield Park Housing Coalition is keeping its eye on its mission — to ensure that any development that comes to the neighborhood benefits the area's long-term residents and gets built with community input.

The coalition was created as part of the East Garfield Park Affordability Plan. The plan, officially unveiled March 10, was developed by the Metropolitan Planning Council, the Garfield Park Community Council and DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies.

The coalition held its first meeting on April 7 online. While the coalition is still something of a work in progress, activists involved are hoping to tackle three development projects coming to the community as soon as possible.

They are particularly interested in Garfield Green, a mixed-use environmentally-friendly development at 201 S. Kedzie Ave., which received Low Income Housing Tax Credits on March 30.

The affordability plan is meant to ensure that new development and rising real estate values in East Garfield Park don't result in the displacement of the area's longtime residents as they have in places like Wicker Park and Logan Square.

The plan lays out a total of 40 strategies designed to empower the community through political activism, support local businesses, support existing homeowners and ensure that residents who can't afford to buy homes are still able to secure ownership stakes in their buildings through cooperatives. The community coalition will be responsible for making sure the plan is executed.

Juan Sebastian Arias, the Metropolitan Planning Council's manager, previously told Austin Weekly News that it was important that this coalition be made up of people who represent the community; otherwise, the coalition would just translate into yet another entity imposing its vision from the outside.

The April 7 meeting was advertised on the coalition's website, with members of the public free to dial in. It attracted many community stakeholders who were involved in developing the affordability plan, but some residents new to the plan dialed in as well.

After some discussion, the coalition agreed to set up three committees: an organizing committee, a development committee and a policy committee. An executive committee will coordinate the three sub-committees and provide overall direction.

Anyone who lives and/or works in East Garfield Park is eligible for committee

membership. The meetings are open to the general public.

The coalition does not currently have a leader. Debbie Liu, a community engagement associate with the Metropolitan Planning Council, said that her organization felt that it would be better to wait until the coalition solidifies before thinking about leadership. They said they would rather a pool of potential leaders emerge organically.

"We're going to co-learn from each other at this point, and, when things are more established, you can have elections or things like that," Liu said.

For information about the collation's upcoming meetings and how to dial in, visit gpcommunitycouncil.org.

Contact:

Email: igorst3@hotmail.com

Love the News?

Become our partner in independent community journalism

Thanks for turning to Austin Weekly News and AustinWeeklyNews.com. We love our thousands of digital-only readers. Now though we're asking you to partner up in paying for our reporters and photographers who report this news. It had to happen, right?

On the plus side, we're giving you a simple way, and a better reason, to join in. We're now a non-profit -- Growing Community Media -- so your donation is tax deductible. And signing up for a monthly donation, or making a one-time donation, is fast and easy.

No threats from us. The news will be here. No paywalls or article countdowns. We're counting on an exquisite mix of civic enlightenment and mild shaming. Sort of like public radio.

Claim your bragging rights. Become a digital member.

Donate Now