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## HJC Policy and Poli. Ed. Newsletter - 6/4/2021

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To: Housing Rights Education Group &lt;housing-rights-education-group@googlegroups.com&gt;

Hello All,

After a hiatus during the month of May, the bi-monthly newsletter is back! This newsletter will be a little light on updates from Council and County Commission as we work to get back in the swing of things. I will post some articles from the major decisions at each City and County meetings with some notes under them.

The important date for HJC is June 21st which is when the City Council will finally vote on whether or not to actually adopt the Charlotte 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Since mid-May, a number of developments have occurred which have further revealed the power dynamics within the city of Charlotte. The Real Estate and Building Industry Coalition (REBIC) spent six figures on a campaign that has placed ads on Black radio and network television that is vague on details and heavy on suggestion. Since the start of this ad campaign in mid-May, REBIC has gone silent during public town halls and discussion and we quickly found out why.

Tracy Dodson, the Assistant City Manager of Economic Development, was revealed to be sending memos to Assistant City Manager of Planning, Taiwo Jaiyeoba, asking to eliminate language around community benefits agreements (CBAs) entirely. Ms. Dodson was a former vice president at Lincoln Harris so thanks to a city staffer it has been revealed that she is using her position to entrench the position of her friends in real estate.

On the positive side with regards to Charlotte 2040, the Charlotte Community Benefits Coalition's (CBC) demands to be recognized as a key stakeholder group as well as establish an anti-displacement commission have been met. With opponents like Ms. Dodson and REBIC, we will still need to continue to push for the CBC to be recognized as the decision makers for CBAs, maintain the anti-displacement stakeholder group as well as strengthen language that makes land use decisions more democratic.

It's important to note that June 21st does not mean that organizing around 2040 will be finished. It will start the process of establishing a whole new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) as well as change the zoning map of the whole city. It is the first step towards changing the ways in which land use decisions are made. Whether or not the Plan is adopted, we will continue to fight to ensure that working class Charlotteans, especially working class Black and Brown Charlotteans, are able to make decisions that are best for their communities.

### Community Updates

- The responses have been tallied and *Judas and the Black Messiah* has been selected for our June Political Education event! We will be hosting a screening of the film on **Saturday, June 26th at 3:00 PM at VisArt Video** with a discussion of the film afterwards. Due to COVID, there is limited seating so please sign up at the Eventbrite link [here](#) to secure your spot for this movie and discussion. Tickets are free and open to anyone interested in attending. A note about the screening: VisArt is graciously letting HJC use this space for free (they usually charge \$35/hr) and they are a 501(c)(3) non-profit video store. As HJC we will be collecting donations during the screening to give to VisArt if you feel inclined. Donations are not required in order to come to the screening but they are welcomed as a way to give back to VisArt for allowing us to use the space.
- We will be having our next HJC Policy and Political Education meeting on **Tuesday, June 15th at 6:00 PM**. I will send out the link for the meeting next week.
- Please continue to support the Cherry Community Organization as they seek to reclaim the Historic Morgan School from CMS. CMS is slated to vote on funding for Arts+ at their Tuesday, June 8th meeting. To find out how you can support, please click the link [here](#).

### The week of 5/24-5/28

#### **Monday, May 24th - Charlotte City Council Regular Business Meeting**

**Full Agenda [Here](#)**

**Full Video of Meeting [Here](#)**

[The Future of Development in Charlotte Could be Decided by a Narrow Council Vote - Charlotte Observer, 5/27/21](#)

City Council's regular business meetings since the release of the Charlotte 2040 Plan have been dominated by debate and discussion of the Plan. May 24th's meeting was no exception. While this meeting was a lot shorter than others, one thing remains clear: the vote to adopt Charlotte 2040 looks like it'll come to a 6-5 based on Councilmembers' straw vote to remove language that would increase density through the creation of duplexes, triplexes.

Earlier in May, Council held a straw vote on whether or not to eliminate Section 2.1 of the Plan which allows duplexes, triplexes on in all Place Types without a rezoning. The Council voted not to eliminate the language with 6 councilmembers voting against the straw vote to eliminate (Councilmembers Julie Eiselt, Dimple Ajmera, Braxton Winston, Malcolm Graham, Greg Phipps and Larken Egleston) while 5 councilmembers voted to eliminate this major keystone in the 2040 Plan (Councilmembers Victoria Watlington, Renee Johnson, Matt Newton, Tariq Bokhari and Ed Driggs).

Despite the straw votes held earlier in May, the Council used this meeting to essentially bicker about fine points and details that they had no intention of voting on. Julie Eiselt suggested possibly changing language around CBAs and referring to it as 'community engagement.' Councilmember Bokhari felt like the Council was being 'managed' by the Planning Department. And on and on.

Mayor Vi Lyles asked that councilmembers meet in small groups in order to see if there could be some areas of alignment. From the meeting, it seemed like Mayor Lyles was uncomfortable with the vote only falling along the lines of 6-5 because it would be seen as contentious and not representative of the broader community (funny how more votes are sought for "legitimacy" in this decision but not in rezoning decisions that are narrowly decided).

A final draft is planned to be released on 6/6/2021 with public hearings to be held in the lead up to the vote for adoption on 6/21/2021.

### **The week of 5/31-6/4/21**

#### **Tuesday, June 1st - Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners Regular Business Meeting**

**Full Agenda [Here](#)**

**Full Video of Meeting [Here](#)**

[Mecklenburg County Votes to Adopt \\$2B Budget, Withholding \\$56 million from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools - WBTV, 6/2/21](#)

As many of you have probably seen, Mecklenburg County and CMS are fighting vigorously over \$56 million. The County is withholding these funds from CMS until CMS devises a plan (that is acceptable to the County Commission) to cut the achievement gap between white students and minority students in the school system. In the aftermath of this, CMS is now mounting a legal challenge to this piece of public policy.

While the top story at the County has been this bitter battle between the County and CMS, in the background is the story of Cherry's Historic Morgan School which the County recently declined their first right of refusal to allow the school to be purchased by the County.

The Historic Morgan School has sat empty since 2017 yet the Cherry Community Organization (CCO) has been attempting to reclaim the school for Cherry since the early 1980s. After the Community Charter School left in 2017, the CCO has been constantly following up with CMS on the status of the school (which is currently listed as a [surplus property in CMS records](#)) in order to turn the school into a community educational center that could provide public space as well as job training and other educational programs (the school property has a deed restriction that limits its uses to educational purposes). CMS has told Cherry that there was a moratorium on any action at the Historic Morgan School until it was revealed earlier this year that CMS was going to provide the space for Arts+. It has been suggested that the deal with Arts+ was the result of County approval of redeveloping Spirit Square, where Arts+ is now located.

With the County declining their first right of refusal, the deal with Arts+ to use the Morgan School now goes to CMS for approval.

What's happening at the Historic Morgan School is part of a larger conversation happening across Charlotte about government entities and their role in facilitating gentrification by privatizing or making public and community spaces

somewhat limited in their use to the public. While the fight for the Historic Morgan School has its own specifics, it shares a similar story to that of the Midwood Cultural Center (formerly Midwood Elementary School) along Central Avenue.

Earlier in May, it was revealed that the Midwood Cultural Center, which is sublet to many non-profit community organizations such as International House, League of Women Voters and ActionNC, is pending a sale from CMS to Monte Richey's Conformity Group in September of 2021. Monte Richey is (was?) the chairman of the board of the Midwood Cultural Center and his Conformity Group specializes in off market real estate transactions. Unlike Historic Morgan School, the Midwood Cultural Center was never on CMS' surplus property list.

At HJC's general meeting, we discussed organizing tenants at the Midwood Cultural Center to push back on the sale of the property. We've learned since talking to people with connections to the Midwood Cultural Center that the deal might not be a sale between Mr. Richey and CMS but some kind of land transfer. Dennis LaCaria, CMS' head of real estate, has seemingly preferred these kinds of shadow transactions in the past in order to circumvent an open bid process and has had experience with Mr. Richey.

Our goal as HJC in regards to both the Historic Morgan School and the Midwood Cultural Center is to support and help organize opposition to these plans to use public facilities for private or semi-private purposes. We want to be able to reclaim these places as public space that serve working class communities. To us, these places are not just pieces of real estate on a Monopoly board; they are places where communities are made. It's a shame that the City, the County and CMS, the people we trust to be stewards of the public interest, are choosing to play the zero sum game of profit.

### **In the News**

- ["\\$2 million for emergency housing vouchers headed to Charlotte from stimulus bill" - Charlotte Observer, 6/2/21](#)
- ["Why Charlotte is becoming a major US tech hub" - WCNC, 5/26/21](#)
- ["Scoop: Memos show top city staff at odds over Comprehensive Plan" - Axios Charlotte, 6/1/21](#)
- ["Corporate Landlord Evicts Black Renters at Far Higher Rates Than Whites, Report Finds" - NPR, 6/3/21](#)

### **Back to Class (Political Education)**

["Stonewall was a Riot" - LeftVoice, 6/1/20](#)

In honor of Pride Month, the piece above outlines the reason for celebration in the first place and argues against the assimilationist political posture argued for by wealthy, white gay men. Pride Month is the result of a riot at the Stonewall Inn against the NYPD who had constantly beaten, harassed, jailed and killed members of the LGBT+ community. The essay writes about Pride's radical beginnings and how they've been co-opted by corporations and even police departments across America. It calls for a return of the revolutionary politics that created the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) that stood on the side of oppressed people not just in the United States but across the globe.