

Local Government Program Recap: *Gentrification: Exploring Solutions*

The April 25, 2018, program, at the Buffalo & Erie County Downtown Public Library auditorium, attracted more than 80 people, including many non-League members who had an interest in this timely issue. Our keynote speaker was J. Rosie Tighe, PhD, associate professor of urban policy and planning at Cleveland State University. Her work focuses on affordable housing, social justice and equitable development as she seeks ways to bridge the gap between research and practice.

The following panelists added insights and perspectives as we considered what solutions from other areas might work here: Veronica Hemphill-Nichols, founder of the Fruit Belt McCarley Gardens Housing Task Force; Sam Magavern, executive director of the Partnership for the Public Good; Dennis Penman, Penman Development Partners; and, via Skype, Marimba Milliones, president & CEO of Hill Community Development Corporation in Pittsburgh, PA.

Our keynote speaker highlighted the differences between gentrification, revitalization and reinvestment. Displacement results in a loss of a sense of community and a change in character. The physical and economic changes can generate resentment and anger. There is a cultural displacement making housing unaffordable for some residents, and subsidized housing with vouchers may involve a ten-year wait. Solutions such as inclusionary building ordinances can make 5 to 20 percent of a development affordable. Other options include affordable housing trust funds, tax policies such as tax abatements, circuit breakers subsidized by the state, or property tax deferral used as a buffer. Being more selective with abatements slows gentrification. Economic inclusion helps low-income, long-term residents. Racial impact statements may help promote and preserve minority businesses. Other options that were mentioned are community benefit agreements, land banks and trusts.

There are trade-offs in gentrification for those who expect urban areas to have the quiet of the suburbs. Communities should expect to have conversations on differences in values and public policy issues. The panel agreed that a champion is needed to deal with some of the relevant issues such as getting to jobs, homelessness, changes in laws to eliminate discrimination, tax exemptions, etc. One of the panelists recommended a good librarian to help with research. They all stressed the importance of a good relationship with media. Partnerships, philanthropy and a master plan are critical components of success even though each problem needs to be addressed as it comes up.

The evaluations were very positive. The Local Government Committee made a great effort to contact a diverse number of organizations through a variety of media to promote the program.

Marian Deutschman, Local Government Committee Chair