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toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .

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On Saturday October 18th the Save Middle East Action Committee (SMEAC) held a rally attended by about 200 residents and allies at John Wesley AME Zion Church just blocks from the Johns Hopkins East-Side medical campus. The rally was in response to broken promises made by East Baltimore Development Incorporated (EBDI) to residents affected by the 90-acre urban renewal project—a collaboration between the City of Baltimore and Johns Hopkins University.

Referred to by many as the "largest urban removal project in the nation," the plan has already relocated more than 500 families in the first of its three phases to make way for a bio-tech park and EBDI's "New East Baltimore."

After seven years of fighting for fair relocation packages and the right for residents to return to their neighborhood, SMEAC secured a promise from EBDI in February of this year. That promise was for a "House for a House" program allowing existing Middle East homeowners to purchase fully

rehabilitated houses within the EBDI project area using the official EBDI Relocation Benefit. According to the plan, no new mortgages would be created and homeowners would not be in greater debt after the move than before it.

The first 10 of these homes were to have been completed by October 31st, but according to SMEAC, EBDI has yet to even hire a contractor.

At Saturday's rally, SMEAC president Donald Grisham addressed the crowd and called on Johns Hopkins to step in and give something back to its neighbors.

"Hopkins sees us as an inconvenience... people of color have always been viewed as sub-standard individuals. When we were poor and didn't have anything and this land wasn't worth anything, they didn't bother us at that time... but after four generations ... they decided, 'I (JHU) want their land.' ... It's a sad thing when a medical institution that is supposed to save lives, can't save this community."

Residents in attendance shared Grisham's sentiments. Ruth Redman is 83 years old and was born at Johns Hopkins Hospital. She's lived on Broadway down the street from Johns Hopkins for 49 years and owns the house she lives in.

"Hopkins just keeps repeating the same thing... They talk to us like we're stupid... I have rights," says Redman. She would like to know why residents are getting inspectors sent to their homes and being forced to renovate their properties or leave while other property owners have let empty houses go for years. As she puts it, "Half of these houses are owned by realtors, but if our property looks dilapidated, they make us fix it up... but you see all these empty houses, those houses are owned by people to and I don't understand why the city never made them fix up their houses...there's something else going on here".

EBDI president Jack Shannon addressed the crowd after they marched a few blocks to his office demanding answers.

Shannon, the same individual that promised the "House for a House" program and agreed to the October 1st deadline, took full responsibility, claiming that his desire to serve this community drove him to make promises that he just couldn't keep. He went on to claim that the recent economic crisis made it difficult for contractors to get the bonds necessary to start the program.

Those present at Saturday's rally seem to have had enough of Shannon's apologies, and closed with two final demands: from now on SMEAC demands to meet directly with EBDI's board and address any problems face to face; and a contract with a developer must be signed in one-week's time.

Check indyreader.org and the next issue of the Independent Reader for updates.

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