

INDYPENDENT READER

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

Published on *Independent Reader* (<https://indyreader.org>)

[Home](#) > Multi-million Dollar Developers not Compensating East Baltimore Residents for Damage to Homes

Multi-million Dollar Developers not Compensating East Baltimore Residents for Damage to Homes

Contributed by:

Umar Farooq[1]

Thursday, December 22, 2011 - 17:02





Carolyn Hutton, 64, tells me to have a seat as she plays a video tape of an ABC2 newscast about her from 2007. The clip shows Ms. Hutton in her home in the 800 block of N Washington St. in East Baltimore, interspersed with shots of construction work going on outside. The structural damage to her home by those machines tearing up the sidewalk on N. Washington in 2007 is the latest in a string of problems she and her neighbors face. They are some of the last remaining residents in an area targeted for development by the Johns Hopkins University as part of a notoriously mismanaged development that is the largest urban renewal plan in the country.

Ms. Hutton moved into her home in 1981. She proudly tells me she has three children, six grand

children, and two great-grand-children, many of them college-educated professionals. Her husband worked at Bethlehem Steel for thirty years, and she herself worked there for many years until she became a home-care nurse.

“We are not the type that lives off the system,” she says.

She says they were offered \$175k for their house in the 1990’s, but turned it down, preferring to remain home-owners. In 2004, Ms. Hutton stopped working as a nurse and opened up a child day-care in her home, quickly drawing many clients from across the city due to her reputation. Her living room walls are covered with pictures of the children she took care of, along with pictures of Barack Obama and the first family.

Within two years, area construction related to the Hopkins-led rehabilitation program, a parking garage, and biotech park would destroy her livelihood, and literally threaten to bring down her house.

Renewal work damages homes

When Hopkins began construction near Ms. Hutton’s house in 2006, they excavated a large area. The huge pit was left unattended, and the abutting foundations of some homes in the 800 block of N. Washington began to slip. Glenn Ross, a long-time community activist in East Baltimore who is currently working for City Councilman Warren Branch, says this was the root of Ms. Ms. Hutton and her neighbors’ problems. He says the houses are already on a hill, and “the hole caused houses to shift back” to the west and away from N. Washington St.

The situation became bad enough that Ms. Hutton was forced to move into a hotel for a month, payed for by East Baltimore Development Inc., a controversial public-private entity managing the development project. As construction on a parking garage kicked up dust and cement, the back deck Ms. Hutton used for her day-care children became unsafe for use. Parents stopped sending their children to Ms. Hutton, for fear the house might not be safe. Ms. Hutton says EBDI compensated her, giving her \$12k, and paying eight of the children’s parents so they could go to other day-care facilities as the construction went on. EBDI helped re-paint the inside of Ms. Hutton’s house, to trap some of the dust that had entered it.

But the compensation was not nearly enough, and funds for patching leaks in the roof and other damage came from Ms. Hutton’s savings. Before 2006, Ms. Hutton’s income was \$30k-35k, but it dropped to half that as the construction project began.

Heating and cooling, made difficult by the leaks caused by damage to the house, became a problem, and the BGE bill skyrocketed to \$1500 a month. She had to take out a \$33k mortgage to keep up with the bills.

“I worked all my life,” she says, breaking down into tears.

The physical and mental stress even forced her to live in an assisted-living home for a short time. Now she says she lives on the \$562 a month she receives for Social Security. In a claim related to the damage, Ms. Hutton asks for lost wages since the construction and funds to repair the damage to her home.

Ms. Hutton has not been the only one impacted by the Hopkins project. She brings me to her kitchen and calls up William Gaskins. Mr. Gaskins is a small-time realtor and owns the house at 808 N. Washington, which he says he rents out to low-income families. He says the EBDI construction near the house caused the roof to collapse, and left him without a tenant for almost nine months. Mr. Gaskins says he suffered more than \$12k in damage to the house, which he ended up repairing out of his own pocket because EBDI did not take responsibility.

820 N Washington's basement flooded from cracks and pipe leaks. 808 and 810 N. Washington shifted back towards the pit. At one point Ms. Hutton took a family that could no longer live in their damaged home and offered her home to them. In total, a dozen homes in a row sustained structural damage to one degree or another from the construction.

Chris Shea, CEO of EBDI, says he only knows of issues with Ms. Hutton's home. He acknowledges that EBDI construction "kicked up dirt", and in response EBDI provided Ms. Hutton with a covered deck. "Why drive neighborhood businesses out of business," he says.

But the structural problems with the houses on N. Washington St. remained, and the Hopkins project was not the end of their troubles.

In October of 2007 a city contracted company, Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc., began work on a \$13.6 million contract for work in front of the homes on Ms. Hutton's block. They dug up the pavement to replace sewer lines and do other work for the City. The entire house began to shake, and Ms. Hutton says she ran outside fearing it would collapse. A claim she filed against the City enumerates the damage: the house's foundation shifted and dislodged the front steps, ceilings in the living room, back bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen cracked, and support beams began to bulge.

Mr. Gaskins' house also suffered damage, cracking the walls due to the vibrations from the work. Pipes began leaking in many houses on the block, and the front of one buckled due to structural damage.

A few months later, the City responded to the claim saying the damage was caused by Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc., and that the matter should be taken up with them.

Baltimore City, developers, and the blame game

It is difficult to pinpoint which damage to the houses on the block was caused by EBDI's construction in 2006, and which was done by Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc. in 2007.

Donald Gresham, a neighborhood activist and former president of the Save the Middle East Action Committee, says "no one is taking responsibility" for the damage. "EBDI has made it very clear that they are not responsible, but it's their project." He says Hopkins and EBDI offer lavish presentations of their plans for the neighborhood, but don't take responsibility for damage to current residents' homes.

Mr. Ross, from Councilman Branch's office, says he thinks residents were misled by EBDI, as they "sent substantial messages that Monumental [Paving & Excavating, Inc.] was responsible." He believes that when Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc. came in to do its work and it simply made the situation worse.

When asked if EBDI's work may have contributed to the damage, CEO Chris Shae expressed skepticism, saying the city "was replacing sewers and pavements, and did damage to the houses," so they should be accountable.

The claims process was delayed as the residents were told they would have to obtain a report from a structural engineer. Ms. Hutton says it took her years to save up the \$5k to have a structural engineer come and assess the damage this Fall.

Two months ago, shortly after the engineer's report was released, Ms. Hutton met with Mr. Ross and Paul Crowl, president of Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc.

When Paul Crowl was called and asked about the claim, he initially said he was "not gonna give any information [about the claim] until the right people get a hold of us." After further questioning, he went on to say "We never did any damage. Talk to the residents."

But Ms. Hutton says at meetings Mr. Crowl, while unwilling to admit fault, has asked her how much compensation she is looking for.

A participant in a subsequent meeting says it was recently learned that Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc. was operating without a permit for part of its time at the site, beginning work four days earlier than permitted, and ending after the permit had expired.

Ms. Hutton has sued Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc. and says she has ample evidence to prove the company is at fault. The drawn out saga and associated intrigue has left Mr. Gaskins very pessimistic. Ms. Hutton and Mr. Gaskins say they are baffled by why such large companies are dragging their feet.

The East Baltimore project is just one of many for Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc., one of the largest donors [2] to the Democratic Party in Maryland. It is also one of the largest recipients of construction contracts from the City. In July 2011, the Baltimore City Council awarded [3] another string of multi-million dollar contracts to the company, even agreeing to pay it almost one million in "cost overruns" on existing work.

Meanwhile, Ms. Hutton, Mr. Gaskins, and the other residents in their block continue to wait for compensation. Neither EBDI nor Monumental Paving & Excavating, Inc. - companies with assets in the tens of millions of dollars, and insurance policies covering far more in possible liabilities - have acknowledged the full extent of damage they have caused to the residents.

Source URL: <https://indyreader.org/content/multi-million-dollar-developers-not-compensating-east-baltimore-residents-damage-homes>

Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/umar-farooq>

[2] http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-08-20/news/0608200185_1_campaign-finance-state-republican-party-account

[3] <http://www.baltimorebrew.com/2011/07/27/city-set-to-approve-cost-overruns-for-water-and-downtown-street-projects/>