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Friends and Residents Background

Friends and Residents is a resident-led organization made up of residents of all ages, from grandchildren to grandmothers, formed to provide meaningful resident input in the HOPE VI process at the Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg Public Housing Dwellings in Washington, DC. Friends and Residents is the voices of residents concerned about being permanently kicked out of their community. Operating on a shoestring budget, Friends and Residents meets weekly in the homes of residents to plan ways to organize the community on HOPE VI and other issues affecting the poor in DC. The group has organized several protests, including a recent protest that successfully stopped the planned closure of the recreation center at Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg. Other activities include offering youth classes, organizing a community pride and clean-up day and organizing other political and cultural projects.

Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg

The Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg Public Housing Dwellings are located at the Navy Yard Metro stop, near the U.S. Marine Barracks in South East Washington, DC. Currently 700 families live in this vibrant community, including over 300 seniors living at the Senior Center. Located within the community is the Arthur Capper Recreation Center, which Friends and Residents successfully kept open after protesting a planned closure of the center. Van Ness Elementary School is also located within the community. In 2001 the community was slated for demolition and rebuilding, using federal funding from HOPE VI. Demolition is slated to be finished in 2005, with all residents (other than the seniors) moved out by that year. Seniors will move once, from their current homes to the new Senior Center. Current plans call for other residents to move twice, which is a major concern of Friends and Residents. The resident-run group cites other HOPE VI projects that essentially lost and forget the original community, replacing low-income residents with higher-income tenants.

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HOPE VI and DC Housing Authority (DCHA)

HOPE VI was intended as a way to rebuild public housing facilities and create mixed income neighborhoods. But cash strapped housing authorities have used it to turn over its valuable housing stock to the private market. According recent articles and columns in the Washington City Paper, the Washington Post and Atlanta's Creative Loafing weekly paper, almost all HOPE VI projects have resulted in displacement of current residents and less overall low income housing. Additionally, HOPE VI requires resident input and one-to-one replacement, although most housing authorities have failed to meet both requirements in practice. Friends and Residents is well aware of the tactics that DCHA and other housing authorities have used in the past, using HOPE VI as a way to increase profits for the few while reneging on the commitment to providing affordable housing for the community. DCHA has recently completed several HOPE VI projects, and in the process of completing another development. In each instance, DCHA failed to provide meaningful resident input and has failed to return former residents to their neighborhood.

Residents Organizing Residents

Friend and Residents realizes that it is facing an uphill battle. Not only do the members of Friends and Residents face the challenges of working with developers and the housing authority, but the group must also overcome stereotypes of public housing residents. By relying on leadership from within the public housing community as opposed to relying on outside advocates or other nonprofits, Friends and Residents believes it can overcome these challenges. To do this, Friends and Residents has made leadership development a top priority and has formed connections with other poor people's organizations, including the Kensington Welfare Rights Union in Philadelphia, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida and the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign. While Friends and Residents places resident leadership as its top priority, it also welcomes supporters and participants from the larger community.

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