

Tenant Solidarity



Tenants Union of Washington “Affordable, Decent Housing For All”

Report to the Community

Organizational Update

In 2010 the Tenants Union of Washington underwent a period of intense strategic planning and rebuilding in the wake of our financial crisis of 2009. The TU emerged from that crisis due to two factors: an unprecedented surge of support from our members and the larger community, and the determined leadership of the Board of Directors to overcome a dire state of affairs.

Channeling that renewed hope from the past year former Executive Director John Lang worked diligently to position

the TU on a stable long-term trajectory by initiating a comprehensive strategic planning process. After much analysis of our core elements this process has been concluded thanks to critical self-reflection by members, allies, board and staff on what kind of work should be the TU’s emphasis.

The conclusion of this process has reaffirmed our core values and objectives:

- Tenants must be the leaders of efforts to transform unjust housing conditions.

- The TU is uniquely suited to realize that principle by emphasizing our community organizing model.

- Tenant education will be key in empowering tenants.

- Education and organizing work must inform policy advocacy.

Hence, we are pleased to announce that we have secured a major grant from a national foundation that will enable the Tenants Union to resume the important work of community organizing, allowing

(Continued on page 2)

Fall Newsletter
2010

www.tenantsunion.org

Special points of interest:

- Learn about our new Executive Director, Jonathan Grant!
- Support critical ballot initiatives.
- Attend upcoming Annual Members Meeting **November 6th**.
- Support the TU at our first Film Forum fundraiser on tenant rights! **November 20th**.

A Special Thanks

Moving Mountains: June 2009 Board of Directors

At a critical moment in our organization’s history, key decisions were demanded of the June 2009 Board of Directors; decisions that could have meant the end of the organization.

Rather than backing away from a harrowing challenge, with the Executive Director position vacant, the Board acted swiftly to rally the community at considerable cost in personal time, resources, and energy.

The Tenants Union owes them the continuation of its legacy and offers a heartfelt thanks.

June 2009 Board of Directors

Quinnie Tan, Board President

Robert Zeller, Vice President

Tenaya Wright, Finance Chair

Margaret van Reuth, Personnel Chair

Derek Low, Secretary

Lisa Herbold

Glenn Harris

Jacquelin Sherrell

Stephanie Sherrell

Inside this issue:

<i>Report to Community</i>	1
<i>New Executive Director</i>	2
<i>Tenant Profile</i>	3
<i>Vote! Ballot Initiatives</i>	4
<i>US Social Forum</i>	4
<i>Featured Resource</i>	5
<i>16th NAHT Conference</i>	5
<i>Fruits of Benson East</i>	6

Report to the Community...

(Continued from page 1)

the organization to grow from its contracted position and begin again its essential work.

Having emerged from that period of uncertainty a formidable strength was revealed in the rally to support the Tenants Union and sustain our shared mission of housing justice. Even in a time of major economic recession and nose-diving government revenue the affirmative response brought to light an unbreakable partnership between our members statewide, the larger community and the Tenants Union in guaranteeing our shared goal in protecting tenants.

We said goodbye to John Lang thanking him for his leadership during this transitional period and orienting the TU in its long-term planning process. We welcome our new Executive Director Jonathan Grant who has been hired for his extensive background in housing advocacy and tenant rights, and is uniquely suited to

implement the long term plan of the organization.

We also acknowledge the hard work of the current Board of Directors for their contributions to the rebirth of the organization, Bette J. Reed, Lynn Sereda, Ginger Segel, Lisa Herbold, Jacquelin Sherrill, Derek Lowe and (formerly) Jonathan Grant.

“...a formidable strength was revealed in the rally to support the Tenants Union and sustain our shared mission of housing justice.”

Even through this period of rebirth the Tenants Union of Washington has had an active role in securing a number of tenant victories. Most notably, Board President Bette J. Reed testified to ensure tenant protections are included in the City of Seattle’s rental housing inspection ordinance, a policy that the TU has champi-

oned over many decades and finally saw come to fruition in the successful vote to pass the ordinance.

On a state-wide level TU Community Organizer Alouise Urness testified in support of important tenant protection legislation, the Fair Tenant Screening Act, a bill that would immensely increase tenants access to housing and access to justice. We also lead a delegation to Housing & Homelessness Advocacy Day in Olympia as well as supported legislation to give tenants more time to move if their tenancy is terminated.

We have kept our doors open for our tenant education program to help tenants to understand their rights, having already served over 1,000 tenants so far in 2010.

Taken together the Tenants Union is growing and fighting for systemic change with renewed focus. This means that the Tenants Union will not only survive, but thrive as a powerful voice for tenants rights throughout Washington State.

The Tenants Union Welcomes Jonathan Grant as New Executive Director

Letter from Board President

Dear Friends,

Building on our momentum and direction for the Tenants Union, it is my pleasure to announce the selection of Jonathan Grant as our new Executive Director! After a successful year of rebuilding and reorganizing we are thrilled to bring him on board and benefit from his demonstrated leadership and experience on tenant rights.



Jonathan Grant, Executive Director

Through the generous financial support of our members as well as foundation and partners throughout the state, I am pleased to say that the Tenants Union is fiscally strong and working hard to build an even broader base of support for our mission and programs.

Jonathan brings years of experience in tenant advocacy and non-profit social services, as well as a thorough knowledge

(Continued on page 3)

New Executive Director Welcomed...

(Continued from page 2)

of landlord-tenant laws and policy. Most recently Jonathan was the senior Tenant Advocate/Housing Counselor at Solid Ground, a community action organization based in King County. There he received the annual Outstanding Community Service Award for his work to break down tenant screening barriers that block access to affordable housing for low-income renters.

He was also a founding staff member of that agency's Advisory Board which is comprised of current and former program participants, a project of the agency's Anti-Racism Initiative to encourage greater transparency and to engage low-income renters with advocacy opportunities. Jonathan is also a voting member on the State Legislative Committee of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, where he has used his position to advance tenant rights in state legislation.

Jonathan received his BA from the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies at the University of Redlands. He also has a certificate in Non-Profit Management from the University of Washington, as well as an advanced paralegal certificate.

As a recent TU Board Member he is uniquely suited to transition into the position having been active in the organization's organizing, program services, and fundraising committees.

After learning of his being hired Jonathan asked to pass this message on:

"With over 30 years of building tenant power it is incredible what the Tenants Union has accomplished over the years, and it's with great enthusiasm that I will join our team of inspired and dedicated staff, members, board, funders, and volunteers. Housing is a human right, not a commodity, and only together can we realize that vision."

Thanks to everyone in the Tenants Union community for their continued support and for amplifying the voice of tenants across Washington State!

Bette J Reed

*Bette J. Reed, Board President
Tenants Union of Washington*

Tenant Profile: Mary Czerniski

Tenants Union Education Program Keeps People Housed and Help Assert Rights

"I just think what you're doing is so valuable. I don't know what I would have done [if the illegal eviction hadn't been stopped]...it's not like people can just walk away from needing shelter."

-Mary Czerniski, TU Member

Mary came to the Tenants Union in May, on the day that her landlord's notice to pay rent would expire and allow him to begin legal eviction proceedings against her. Mary didn't believe she owed the money, because she and the landlord had agreed to reduce her rent to partially compensate her for many hours of landscaping work on his property.

Immediately after talking to a TU tenant counselor, Mary wrote a response to her landlord's notice just in time to meet the deadline after being connected to legal



Mary Czerniski, was served an illegal eviction notice and received counseling from TU organizer Alouise Urness in May 2010.

services through the TU to help her take the next steps to prevent the eviction.

Mary came back to the TU office to thank us, saying, "I just think what you're doing is so valuable. I don't know what I would have done [if the illegal eviction hadn't been stopped]...it's not like people can just walk away from needing shelter."

Mary is happily gardening at a new rental cottage now; she tells us, "I've had so many lucky things happen...and the first lucky thing was that I went to the Tenants Union for help."

Ballot Initiative Endorsements

Vote on these critical initiatives—Compiled from Ballot Initiative Network

YES on 1098

There is one initiative that deserves a “yes” vote and that’s **I-1098**. Bill Gates, Senior, is leading the effort for the citizen-sponsored 1098, so that we can invest in our future and protect low-income and middle class taxpayers. 1098 will raise \$2 billion a year dedicated to education and health care.

It cuts state property taxes by 20 percent, and eliminates B&O taxes for 80% of small businesses. The wealthiest 1.2 percent of households will pay a strictly limited income tax, and it includes accountability measures so that the tax rates or who pays them cannot be changed without a vote of the people.

We have already cut \$4.4 billion from our state budget: 44,000 people have lost Basic Health Plan coverage, 2,600 education jobs were eliminated, and college tuition has skyrocketed by nearly 30 percent while scholarships have been cut. Further cuts will seriously harm the things that we value.

NO on 1053

Tim Eyman’s latest effort, I-1053, would give just 17 extremely partisan legislators the power to block the majority from taking action. If approved no tax measure could pass without a two-thirds majority vote. California has the same restriction and it has only caused partisan gridlock there. If Eyman’s initiative passes the legislature’s hands would be tied from protecting our most vulnerable populations and education and healthcare services we all value.

Report from the United States Social Forum

Housing and Social Justice Activists Convene in Detroit En Masse

By Lynn Sereda (STOP Campaign and TU Board Member)

On June 22nd, 18,000 people from all over America converged in Detroit for the second United States Social Forum (USSF). Building on the first USSF held in Atlanta in 2007, social justice activists involved in causes such as immigrant justice, anti militarism, anti-poverty, and environmental justice to name a few, spent nearly a week building networks and becoming informed on what organizers are doing across America. A Social Forum is a very intense experience with many activities to choose from. There were one thousand workshops, evening plenaries, film, art and cultural performances as well as several marches and demonstrations all across Detroit, a city hard hit by the economic crisis.

It is precisely because Detroit is considered ground zero in the economic crisis which is why it was chosen to host the USSF. The collapse of the auto industry and the loss of industrial manufacturing jobs has resulted in a 45% unemployment

rate according to the Moratorium Now! Coalition of Michigan, which has called on their Governor to declare a statewide economic emergency and impose a two year moratorium on foreclosures and evictions to stabilize the housing crisis in the region.

“...many people told heartbreaking stories of losing their homes but also their resolve to strategize and build a movement to prevent even more people from the same predicament.”

Similar to the first Social Forum in Atlanta, housing activists were very well organized and represented, and there were dozens of housing workshops to attend including those led by public housing residents, as well as anti-foreclosure workshops where many people told heartbreaking stories of losing their homes but also their resolve to strategize and build a

movement to prevent even more people from the same predicament.

A group of hundreds of people, many of them homeless, caravanned all the way to Detroit from New Orleans. They were organized by the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC), a 12 year old national coalition of grassroots organizations and non-profits building a movement uniting the poor to end poverty. The marchers found places to stay along the way and gathered even more marchers on the road to Detroit.

PPEHRC helped lead the Anti-Poverty Summit on the first day of the Social Forum which included a panel of people from all over the country giving reports on how the crisis is manifesting in each area, and how people are organizing on poverty issues. After small group breakout discussions, the Poverty Summit attendees then rallied at DTE Energy headquarters and held a press conference about how utility shut offs are affecting

(Continued on page 7)

Featured Tenant Resource: Housing Justice Project

The **Housing Justice Project (HJP)**, a pro bono service of the King County Bar Association, is a homelessness prevention program providing accessible volunteer-based legal services to low income tenants facing eviction in King County. HJP offers counsel and advice, negotiations, and limited representation at show cause hearings to qualifying tenants.

In 2009, HJP served 2,510 clients at its daily courthouse clinics in Seattle and Kent. This year, HJP is on target to surpass that record with 1,820 clients served through August 2010. On a weekly basis, HJP operates 12 walk-in clinics. With a minimal staff, HJP relies almost exclusively on the dedication of volunteer legal assistants and attorneys to serve an ever-growing and increasingly complex caseload.

If you are a tenant facing an eviction court hearing it is important to receive legal advice. Not responding to a lawsuit can often cause you to waive your rights and lose automatically.

For more information, locations and hours call:

(206) 267-7090 (English) or **(206) 267-7091** (Español)
or visit: <http://www.kcba.org/legalhelp/HJP/clients.aspx>



Housing Justice Project volunteer attorneys reviewing a tenant's legal documents at court. Photo by Lynn Sereda

When you come into the Housing Justice Project legal clinic, if possible, be sure to bring with you:

- Your lease
- Notices (3-day Pay or Vacate, 20-day Termination, Etc.)
- Eviction Lawsuit (Summons and Complaint)
- Receipts, Photos, or other relevant documentation
- Other agreements signed between you and the landlord

16th Annual Nat'l Alliance of HUD Tenants Conference Report on Save Our Homes Conference in Washington, D.C.

By Ua Ha, Board President of Benson East Tenant Association

PETRA is one of the issues which I am most concerned about. PETRA, the Preservation, Enhancement and Transformation of Rental Assistance Act of 2010, is a proposed law that Secretary Donovan of US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has asked Congress to pass. PETRA would drastically change the public housing in the United States by having much of it privatized, threatening low-income citizen's access to permanent affordable housing. PETRA is also a radical transformation of thirteen HUD rental assistance programs into a new,

single "funding stream" and uniform rules affecting all HUD assisted tenants.

Why should we care? Because HUD is proposing to sell public housing to private developers and management companies. These private owners would have to sign a contract promising to keep units affordable for a certain period of time, depending on the type of the contract. After the

"...HUD is proposing to sell public housing to private developers and management companies."

contract expires, however, there are no guarantees. PETRA also allows residents of newly privatized units to have access to tenant vouchers after two years, if they want to use them instead.

This means fewer vouchers will be available to those residents who have been on a waiting list for those vouchers. People who are homeless and in unstable housing wait years to get off the Section 8 waiting lists and receive a voucher, now they will have to wait longer before they can access housing. PETRA isn't law yet, it's just a proposal and we still have an opportunity to stop or change it. We must fight to keep our public, affordable housing!

Fruits of Tenant Ownership at the Benson East

Summer Garden Tour

By Alouise Urness, TU Organizer

At the tenant-controlled Benson East Duplexes in September you can actually see the fruits of tenant ownership. After years of the TU organizing with residents to form a tenant association, successfully concluded in 2002, a new model of ownership became a beacon of autonomy.

Because the ownership model is accountable to the tenants and committed to low-income housing, tenants here know that the rent is not going to increase to market rate, they're not going to be arbitrarily evicted, and maintenance and improvements happen on a schedule that is good for the complex, not just the owner's bank account (the "owner" is the Benson East, LLC, a non-profit with the tenants making up 1/3 of its board).

Hence tenants at the Benson East stay in their homes much longer given its inherent stability, many having been there for 10 or 20 years, and invest their energy there, especially in their gardens. The gardens at each duplex unit are at their peak right now, with tomatoes, grapes, plums, potatoes, cabbages, corn, herbs



Tecla watches as Aurelian digs potatoes. Photo by Alouise Urness

and pink dahlias bigger than a jack-o'-lantern, among the produce and flowers ready for picking. Benson East tenants are proud of their gardens and happily showed me around one afternoon.

Aurora Almasan has lived at the Benson East for 15 years; her son and his young family live in another Benson East unit. Her son helped her build an arbor for grape vines that shade her back yard. Mrs.

Almasan surrounds her back patio with tomatoes, beans, and a huge bed of parsley. The front yard she reserves for flowers. "I like flowers but I don't have the strength like before – but I use all my strength for my flowers."

Aurelian Chibici and Tecla Catuna have been planting at their Benson East home for 22 years. A tidy row of cabbages rest below the grape vines climbing the side of their duplex unit. The biggest, most highly-scented rose bush in their front yard came all the way from their native Romania.

In the back yard, a compost bin feeds the soil where they grow potatoes, surrounded by the giant pink dahlias. Tecla explained how the huge flowers came to be throughout the complex, "Every spring we share the seeds with our neighbors – all the big pink dahlias around here came from ours."

Ionel and Elena Perian have been at the Benson East only 2 years, and already their gardens are lush and productive.



Mrs. Almasan and her grape arbor. Photo by Alouise Urness.

(Continued on page 7)

Fruits of Benson East...

(Continued from page 6)

Roses surround a bench in the front yard, and in the back they've built a small arbor that supports many hanging flower pots. Raised beds full of squash vines surround their patio. Ionel was relaxing in his front yard with neighbor Constantin when he told me, "I like to make it beautiful because when I go out I want to feel pleasant – and it's not too expensive to make a garden."

The gardens of the Benson East thrive as a testament to what can be accomplished from community organizing, where neighbors can share their garden's vegetables with the comfort of knowing they control their environment.



Flowers bloom for residents at Benson East. Photo by A. Urness

US Social Forum...

(Continued from page 4)

over 100,000 people every year in the Detroit metropolitan area.

According to local organizers, 18 people lost their lives in Detroit in one year due to utility shut offs. Most of the deaths occur when natural gas (a primary heating source in the harsh winters there) is shut off, and some families resort to using propane or space heaters to provide heat, which have resulted in fatal fires. At the rally, the list of names of deceased were read. They included a family with three small children who died, as well as another family where two elderly wheelchair bound people also died. Symbolic coffins were carried as the rally then joined the larger march which officially opened the Social Forum. Thousands marched through Detroit with banners, signs, giant puppets and more bringing attention to causes such as health care and housing for all, as well as anti-war and anti-corporate greed movements.

On each day, actions and marches were happening all over the city. There was a protest outside of Chase Bank about its role in the foreclosure crisis nationally. Activists urged people to bank elsewhere

as a protest. There was a protest outside a community center that Senior Citizens use which is being closed by the city which recently closed half the schools.

The economic crisis is so visible in Detroit. There are many blocks of boarded up homes at the city's margins, old factories rusting abandoned, and whole areas reminiscent of New Orleans after Katrina with homes being torn down, streetlights and traffic lights turned off. Detroit in the 1950's was the fourth largest city in America with nearly 2 million people. It boasted of having the highest paid working class in the US thanks to the strong unions, and now the city has lost a little over half of its population and is now the most impoverished major city. Other manufacturing cities like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are also experiencing this crisis.

While it may feel comforting to live in Seattle where this kind of large scale poverty is not as apparent, the delegation of 51 Seattle area activists discussed in debriefing meetings that what is happening in a city like Detroit which was once very prosperous can happen to any city. Indeed, while not impacted as seriously as other cities when the foreclosure crisis started three years ago, Washington State is now seeing a sharp rise in foreclosures

“Local Seattle delegates who went to Detroit are now discussing ways that the national calls to action can be organized locally.”

putting it into one of the leading states in numbers of housing foreclosures.

The final day of the US Social Forum included the National Peoples Movement Assembly, where groups from all the themes of the USSF presented proposals and national calls to action to the thousands of people who attended. Led by the Indigenous Sovereignty Group who presented their platform first, all of the work during the week in Detroit was synthesized into concrete proposals for actions. Included in the call to action are days in October to mobilize around housing and tenant rights as well as a more general Poverty awareness day in October. Local Seattle delegates who went to Detroit are now discussing ways that the national calls to action can be organized locally. Stay tuned for more information.

I would like to thank Center for Social Justice, and LELO for organizing the NW Delegation to Detroit and make it possible for the Tenants Union to be represented!



The Tenants Union
of Washington
5425 B Rainier Avenue South
Seattle WA, 98118

Phone: 206-722-6848
www.tenantsunion.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #3087
Seattle, WA

The Tenants Union is Hiring

**Job Announcement—Community Organizer
& Tenant Counselor**

Return Service Requested

Job Summary: The Community Organizer and Tenant Counselor works with tenants facing housing loss or substandard housing conditions through organizing, education, and tenant leadership development. The position has a geographic emphasis in Seattle and South King County.

For further details on duties, salary, benefits and how to apply visit our **website**. The position is open until filled; however our priority is given to applications received prior to **October 24th** 2010. The anticipated start date is November 29th.

Please, no phone inquiries.

The Tenants Union Calendar

Annual Membership Meeting

Saturday, November 6th

1:30—3:30pm

Yesler Terrace Community Center
917 East Yesler Way, Seattle WA

Elect Board members, hear tenants' testimonies from conferences in DC, celebrate policy victories and discuss upcoming legislation in 2011!

Lunch with program.

Please join us!

Call 206-722-6848 **x109** to RSVP

Renew Membership

Or become a member for the first time! If you received this Newsletter in the mail there will be a **Membership Form** with an addressed envelope for your convenience.

Members receive benefits such as having access to the Tenant Rights Message Center, where members can call and leave a question for TU staff to return their call.

Members have voting power at our Annual Meetings to help steer the Tenants Union and elect Board Members.

As the preeminent organization for tenants in Washington State we rely on your support to keep fighting for housing justice. If there is no form within, join via our website! www.tenantsunion.org

Film Forum

“Boom: The Sound of Eviction”

[A fundraiser for the Tenants Union!](#)

Saturday November 20th

2:30pm-5pm

Rainier Valley Cultural Center

3515 S Alaska St, Seattle, WA 98118

Come celebrate the rebirth of the Tenants Union at our first Film Forum fundraiser!

Tickets are on a sliding scale, and all donations are valued. Please **save the date** for now, and look for more information on our website: www.tenantsunion.org

Our featured film (“Boom...”) covers the contradictions in the dot-com era that resulted in wide-scale gentrification.