**COFIE Meeting Notes**

**November 3, 2016**

**Gentrification: A Retrospective with Dace West, Executive Director Mile High Connects**

The meeting opened with COFIE members introducing themselves to the group and sharing a brief check in.

Jamie then introduced Dace West, Executive Director of Mile High Connects. Dace was one of two keynote speakers at the 2015 COFIE external session, presenting on gentrification in Denver. Dace was invited back to provide an update on the current state of housing affordability in Denver, policies in place or in progress to address issues related to access to housing and public transit, and the future of gentrification as Denver’s continues to grow at an unprecedented rate.

Dace began with a recap of how Mile High Connects began, and the organization’s evolution over time, specifically its more intentional naming and focus on gentrification. She then reviewed some of slides from October 2015 session to provide context for those who were not present at the October 2015 COFIE session.

Dace then shared a Power Point presentation that highlighted several key facts and statistics related to the affordable housing crisis Denver (PowerPoint available on COFIE website).

**Facts & Statistics:**

*The Housing Market*

* Average housing price in Denver is $360, 000
* People would need to make $70,000 per year in order not to be housing cost burdened in Denver
* Housing costs are rising by 20%, while income is only rising by 2%
* Working toward policy solutions that keep people in place
* There is an 80,000 unit housing shortage at the lowest income levels (we would have to double the number of affordable housing units in order “build our way out” of the current housing shortage (53,235)
* Speculative buying is a major contributor to gentrification (corporations buying houses from home owners)
* Denver is the 7th hottest gentrifying market in the country

*Gentrification & Racism*

* Gentrification conversations = conversations about racism
* There is a racial element to gentrification—communities are getting “white washed”
* Racist policies include code enforcement, particularly in suburban communities (e.g. limits the number of people living in a home and number of cars parked outside)

*What’s Being Done?*

* The city of Denver released a Gentrification Study in May

Dace then opened the conversation up for Q & A.

**Q: What are the policies being considered? What are the important interventions from a policy and resource perspective to make sure communities are preserved:**

* Preserve affordability of current housing near transit
* Figure out how to integrate the conversation happening in community with policy solutions being developed
* Land Trusts—collective ownership
* Strengthen policy and enforcement of protections for renters (Colorado is one of the weakest renter protection states in the country)
* Create jobs for residents
* Support organizing and engagement of community residents
* Utilize arts
* Maintain access to transit

Mile High Connects is focusing on:

1. City of Denver (specific neighborhoods)
2. Aurora with focus on Original Aurora
3. Lakewood
4. Unincorporated Adams County
5. Westminster

Wins

* September -$150 million dollar fund for creating and preserving affordable housing
* Policy platform for rental protections
* Property tax rebates for seniors and lower income residents (in conversation phase)
* Right to return policy (if you’ve been displaced by a government action i.e. imminent domain), with any new affordable housing built in the neighborhood, priority and preference will be given to displaced residents to allow them to move back into the neighborhood
* Adams County—renter protections, manufactured housing, Adams County has the most in the state(form of home ownership for lowest income residents)
* Adams county and Westminster—market rate affordability
* Lakewood—authorized a complete housing study to determine the mix of housing they need to keep up
* Aurora leading in supportive service housing and homelessness
* Powerful emergence of different organizing groups working together
* Lots of groups working on resources for people (comprehensive resource list provided by MHC available on COFIE website)

*Challenges*

* Ancillary rising costs, i.e. taxes, services in the community going up
* Suburbanization of poverty—Original Aurora is a prime example of this with 0% vacancy in Original Aurora, and more people doubling up and more homeless families
* Dramatic increase in the number of children qualifying for free and reduced lunch in Denver and huge increase in the school districts in Eastern parts of the state
* Schools don’t have the same amount of support services in those areas

**Q: What is important for grant makers/the philanthropic community to think about/do in response to gentrification—driven by residents?**

* NEWSED—Arc of Justice film—about the creation of the 1st community land trust (strong culture across the south and in the NE, Dudley Street is the most famous example) Grounded Solutions (formerly the National Community Land Trust) Lowry and in Boulder Thistle Communities in Colorado
* Are marijuana industry profits going into affordable housing? How can marijuana profits be invested?
* Are there examples of “good” gentrification? Little Tokyo in LA worked with Eco Districts out of Seattle—good organizing by residents, maintained neighborhood flavor and Magnolia Initiative from California Endowment