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What would it be like if you had to be uprooted from your community?

Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community Musings

by Patrick J. O'Connor

poc44121@yahoo.com

What would it be like if you had to say good bye to your neighbors because your neighborhood is going to be torn down?

What would it be like if you had to leave your friends behind? Friends you've known and loved for years, for decades.

This is exactly what our neighbors are facing who call Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community their home.

They do not own the land where their homes are located. But does that disqualify their voices from the conversation?

Presently, the deed is held by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC). As reported by Plain Dealer and cleveland.com writer Stephen Litt, "The conservancy bought the property for \$5.8 million in 2021 from a subsidiary of Dallas-based Moore Enterprises, which previously announced it would sell to the highest bidder. The triangle-shaped property, located north of Lakeshore Boulevard, was once part of the popular Euclid Beach Amusement Park, which operated on the site and on adjacent parcels, from 1895 to 1969. (Plain Dealer July 11, 2023)

It's an open secret that the Western Reserve Land Conservancy bought the property with the intention of turning it over to the Metroparks, like they did several years ago with Acacia Country Club in Lyndhurst.

This 'straw' purchase of Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community by WRLC is intended to save the Metroparks from doing the dirty work of evicting the residents. More to the point, it avoids accountability under the Uniform Relocation Act (URA) that requires adherence to standards to resettle people by entities that have received federal funding, like the Metroparks.

With these considerations in mind, it's worth noting that an important development has taken place.

The Mandel Foundation has awarded the Western Reserve Land Conservancy a \$10M grant, \$6.2 million is earmarked to assist residents living in the 124 occupied mobile homes that remain in the community. The money will not be evenly divided, but will be distributed on a case-by-case basis.

That's the crux of the matter. Why? Instead of working with the Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community, the Mandel Foundation is telling the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to deploy a divide and conquer strategy. This is not a path to a fair and equitable resolution, especially if the Western Reserve Land Conservancy wants to abide by the Unified Relocation Act (URA).

The Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community is united. They are organized and their voices are united. With the help of the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), they have formed the United Residents of Euclid Beach (UREB).

The Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community wants to preserve their neighborhood, their friendships, their community. For this reason they deserve an opportunity to present themselves as a community who wants to remain together.

Christopher Knestrick, executive director of the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), said "the Mandel grants show that there's enough money in Cleveland to make it possible for the residents to remain in the mobile homes, to rebuild the failing utilities in the community, and to pay off the land conservancy for its investment. The community has been clear that they don't want to leave and they've come up with options [to stay] that haven't been heard adequately," Knestrick said. While he said the Mandel grant could provide tens of thousands of dollars to mobile home residents for relocation expenses, displacement is "a question of justice, not of payment."

"What is the value of our homes, our livelihoods, the trauma, the pain of being torn from your home? What value does the community put on that?" Knestrick said. "There is no monetary value that can replace what a home means to a person. Or, I might offer, a community." (Plain Dealer July 11, 2023)

The Metroparks Board of Commissioners and Administration have been exemplary stewards of our parks. It would be a shame if this history of noble and civic leadership should be sullied if the Metroparks did not exert their influence with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy in facilitating a just and equitable solution with our neighbors who call Euclid Beach Mobile Park Community their home.

The Commissioners are amenable to hearing from the community. Please share your concerns with them, either in writing or by phone or in person at the next Commissioners' meeting on Thursday, September 21st at 8:00am.

Mr. Bruce G. Rinker
President, Cleveland Metroparks Board of Commissioners
Mr. Dan T. Moore
Vice President, Cleveland Metroparks Board of Commissioners
4101 Fulton Parkway
Cleveland, OH 44144
216-635-3200