

A BAD PENNY ALWAYS TURNS UP

By Kayla Miranda

As I watched new councilwoman, Terry Castillo, of District 5 sworn in, the moment she raised her fist in solidarity with the people she had fought for, I cried out in pride, relief and hope. For me, she is a beacon of light and hope for the low income, people of color in the Westside. Our voices were finally heard, when so many tried to silence us. We were finally free from a developer-friendly gentrifier that we had had in office. It was a great day.

The day before she took office, I participated in public comment for the Housing Trust against the Friedrich Development. This “affordable” housing complex has 358 units, of which only 14 are set aside for people earning 60% AMI (Area Median Income) or below. For those not familiar with AMI, HUD calculates an AMI that is used as a guide for income levels in your area. San Antonio is clumped together with San Marcos and New Braunfels, which raises our income. 60% AMI for a single person is \$31,140 a year, or \$14.97 an hour. I say single person, because the apartments that will be at 60% are studio and one-bedroom apartments. The remaining units will be set at higher rates, including almost half at market rate. The 14 units are not affordable to the City of San Antonio’s own Parks and Recreation employees, who start at \$9.79 an hour. The proposed “affordable” rental rate for the studio

(0 BR) is \$767 a month, and the one-bedroom is \$822 a month, higher than many normal market rate apartments. In exchange for these 14 units, the developer gets tax free land for a period of 75-99 years, (millions of dollars a year.)

The meeting started late with Jim Plummer, the attorney for the trust who wrote the tax credit law loophole with developers, calling them directly into private session forcing the public to wait. After over 20 community members spoke out against this development as not affordable, the board did



Jessica Guerrero, the outgoing chair of San Antonio’s Housing Commission, speaks during a press conference/rally regarding the city’s housing.

the unthinkable. The reason for the special session was stated, a supposed lawsuit that they claimed would lose the city millions if the project was not pushed through. Former Councilwoman Shirley Gonzáles, a supporter of the project had called District 9’s Councilman Courage a racist during the recorded meeting a week prior when he questioned the affordability of this project. With District 9’s councilman changing his position, they approved the vote. We were all shocked! That very same councilwoman who fought to demolish our homes at the Alazans and displace

over a thousand people in the process approved this horrible project giving millions to developers on her last day and was being considered for the Chair of the Housing Position. And got it.

The saying, “Always comes back like a bad penny” comes to mind. We had just broken free in District 5, only to be thrown back into Gonzáles clutches citywide! This causes so much concern. Not only because of previous projects championed by her, but also because due to the passing of Prop A, the housing bond that will now be a hot topic in the city. The need for real affordable housing has never been higher. We need people in office and on boards who will fight for us instead of for developers. There are many ways that the real estate industry abuses these funds and it is up to us to be vigilant. We must take a stand. We must use our voice. If not us, then who?

If you are interested in joining the fight, you can go to Facebook and like the pages of Coalition for Tenant Justice, Mi Barrio No Se Vende and the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. Also, check out my blog: www.westdefender.org or email me at organizing@esperanzacenter.org

Unit Type	AMI	Units	Net Rent
0BR	60%	2	\$767
0BR	80%	20	1,100
0BR	Mkt	21	1,100
1BR	60%	7	\$822
1BR	80%	81	1,375
1BR	Mkt	88	1,500
2BR	60%	5	\$987
2BR	80%	64	1,420
2BR	Mkt	70	1,800

BIO: Kayla Miranda, resides at the Alazán Apache Courts with her children and organizes in the Westside of San Antonio around housing and other issues.

The Friedrich Development group claims “affordable” housing status, but the complex has 358 units, of which only 14 are set aside for people earning 60% AMI (Area Median Income) or below—about \$31,140 per year or \$14.97 per hour.