

ALAZAN COURTS REIMAGINED

By Kayla Miranda

Kicking off the first official meeting with community and residents of Alazan/Apache Courts, Able City and SAHA (San Antonio Housing Authority) had a joint one hour session on February 1, 2022. The usual advocates and nay-sayers attended, as well as a few confused residents that are new to the property and have no idea what is going on. This is a concern. In October of 2019, I led a group of outreach workers to knock on doors and speak to residents on both sides of the property issue. The majority, when given all the facts, preferred preservation to demolition. When I say all the facts, it means ALL the facts. Including what will happen to the neighborhood and community if demolition happens and examples of other public housing units that have been renovated. There are options for both preservation and demolition. Pros and cons for both. But the community spoke up.

The weekend before the kickoff meeting, returning to doors, I found that there are a large number of new tenants. I was also informed that another tenant who prefers demolition has been gathering followers, also. I invited some of the tenants who didn't have access to the internet to the Rinconcito de Esperanza and had a small group using one zoom under the title of CTJ, Coalition for Tenant Justice, a tenant organization I helped form in 2020.

As the conversation got more intense, these tenants got more uncomfortable. They felt bullied. Not by SAHA, not by Able City, but by the 2 residents that continuously attacked preservation in the chat, the same two that have always advocated for demolition, even when that meant the displacement of over half its residents. One of them said during public comment on the October 2020 SAHA Commission meeting that she hates this neighborhood and



blames the community for her husband leaving her. She stated that she is not from this area and that she is very unhappy here. Yet, this resident spoke for all residents? One of the questions residents asked me was: If I participate will I have to deal with that? The answer should be no. I believe everyone is entitled to their own opinions. I will hear out anyone who is behaving and speaking respectfully. Unfortunately, for the most part, these conversations often turn ugly pretty quickly. One of many reasons tenants refuse to speak up.

They are afraid of being confronted at their homes by their own neighbors. The sad thing is, we don't need to fight. The residents who want new construction can have it. And those of us that want preservation can also have it. There are 44 units available in the new construction of Legacy at Alazan, and new units will more than likely be built to ensure we keep 501 units. The answer to the conflict is simple. Give the new units to the tenants that want them. Allow preservation for the tenants that prefer that. Why should we have to choose?

I believe that a lot of the problem is a lack of information. Many community members believed the previous SAHA leadership when they said that the units could not be saved if they wanted modern amenities such as air conditioning and washer/dryer hookups. The reality is that they can be. Some tenants are also under the impression that the units would be the same size. HUD has changed its regulations since the original units were built, the units whether new or remodeled will have to comply with current regulations. Once the inside is demo-ed, they will need to combine some units to accommodate larger spaces. The electrical and plumbing will be new. Everything

inside the unit will be new. The back and forth is completely counterproductive. Many individuals are under the impression that when we say preserve, we mean keep exactly the same. That couldn't be farther from the truth. We aren't talking about slapping some paint on the inside and calling it new. It means completely new insides while keeping the outside. My question to those who demand complete demolition, if we can address all the construction related concerns while still preserving historical buildings, why is demolition necessary? Why are you so adamantly against saving anything?


There are also security and infrastructure concerns from many residents. First, a reality check is needed here. Razing a community to lower the crime rate is ridiculous. Brand new buildings will not change that. Forcing out the current population will not address the problems. In the 4 hour orientation all SAHA tenants take prior to moving in, the security officer does a presentation for future tenants. Part of this presentation is statistics like 95% of all crime on SAHA properties are not committed by tenants. It's people that come to public housing properties. I have had plenty of personal experience with this. Some keep shooting out the street lamps in the parking areas and green spaces in between buildings. The parking lot behind my unit is

pitch black and hidden at night. I've seen cars come and go, parking for a while. I've seen people participating in lewd acts inside their vehicles and drug deals etc. But they don't live here. It's a spot that they know is dark, in an area that people are afraid to speak up. As residents, we know that any police reports or calls tied to a SAHA address automatically goes to the front office. We don't want the trouble on our doorstep. The problem is not the buildings.

It is not the residents. It is the people from other areas that use our community in a negative way. Better lighting, more security on the properties, even video cameras in parking lots would help combat these issues.

In closing, I want to remind everyone that discrimination comes in many forms. It's so easy for the oppressed to become the oppressors out of fear, trauma and a lack of information. It is time to stop villainizing public housing. Stop visualizing scenes from "Boyz in the Hood" every time you think about the courts. It's important to see the whole picture. This is an opportunity for our community to shine. To heal. It's time we dream up a positive future.

BIO: Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazan/Apache Courts.



REIMAGINE ALAZAN COURTS

SAHA is kicking off a new master planning process to determine the future of Alazan Courts. The design team hopes to learn from Alazan residents about their priorities and how SAHA housing can best serve them. Please join us for the Reimagine Alazan Courts Kick Off or stop by the Open House at Alazan Courts Community Center for a one-on-one conversation.

FEBRUARY 1ST
TUESDAY
4:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Master Plan Virtual Kick Off

FEBRUARY 2ND - 18TH
M-F 3PM - 4PM
Saturday 11AM - 1PM

Open House the Alazan Courts Community Center

JOIN ON ZOOM OR FACEBOOK LIVE
To sign up for the zoom: bit.ly/alazan-zoom

JOIN US IN PERSON AT THE ALAZAN COURTS COMMUNITY CENTER
1011 S Brazos St, San Antonio, TX 78207

If you have any questions email us at community@able.city

Composer Carla Lucero

Continued from Page 9

What Do You Hope That Audiences Will Take Away From The Opera?

I hope that audiences identify with the tests of faith and conscience that the three women in the opera face. In the end, following our conscience is having faith in the goodness within us and acting accordingly. This is a universal concept to me, and not specific to any religious belief. Through empathy comes tangible goodness and change for the better, if we put away our fears. The Passion can be uplifting and motivating. I really hope this comes through in The Three Women.

Could You Talk A Bit About Having The Piece Performed In Spanish?

It's a passionate and beautiful language that I am proud to have as part of my heritage. I have written

operas in both Spanish and English, and honestly, both languages work wonderfully when they are set to music. Spanish is softer on the tongue and on the ear with rich and round vowel sounds. Spanish is not my first language, so I enlisted the assistance of an amazing poet and translator, Dr. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX who is also a theater artist. She translated my original libretto from English to Spanish very carefully, so that it would register culturally and poetically with the audience. I hope that the Spanish speaking communities of Los Angeles and beyond will accept this as a love letter from me to them. See: bit.ly/threeWomen



Dr. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, Trinity University