



Inaugural ONE Northside convention looks at homelessness

Special to the online edition of Windy City Times

by Jason Carson Wilson

2014-05-06



Photo by Jason Carson Wilson

Power brokers and everyday people gathered in Anshe Emet Synagogue's sanctuary Saturday for ONE Northside's first annual convention. Lakeview Action Coalition and Organization of the Northeast merged in July 2013 to form the new entity, which aims to "build collective power to eliminate injustice."

Securing affordable housing on the North Side has been among its highest priorities. Years of community organizing helped yield the redevelopment of the more than six-acre former Children's Memorial Hospital site in

Lincoln Park.

"[It's] proof [that] broad-based community organization really works," Robert Rohdenburg said.

Rohdenburg once called the now-closed Chateau Hotel, 3838 N. Broadway, home. James Cappleman, the alderman of the 46th Ward, told the media in January 2013 that the property had been sold to local investors. It had provided one of the options for low-income residents in the area.

According to ONE Northside, around 2,500 single-resident occupancy (SRO) tenants have been displaced since 2011. There are more than 6,000 "at risk" SRO residents in the city. ONE Northside leader Elgin Stewart stressed the seriousness of the situation.

"We are facing a homeless crisis," Stewart said.

So the organization, he said, is "building city-wide power." It is using that power to push a ONE Northside-crafted proposed SRO ordinance.

It requires SRO owners to apply for permits, in order to change the building in any way. The city would only grant the permit, if owners pledge to maintain 80 percent of the building as affordable housing units. Failure to comply would result in a fee.

Second Ward Ald. Robert Fioretti, 27th Ward Ald. Walter Burnett Jr. and 43rd Ward Ald. Michelle Smith publicly pledged to support the ordinance. Cappleman was visibly absent.

"SRO is the next step from sleeping on someone's couch," Burnett said.

The ordinance is slated to be introduced during Chicago City Council's May 28 meeting.

"We need you there to fight for Chicago," said the Rev. Dan Dale of Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ.

Tom Tunney, alderman of the 44th Ward, thanked Dale's congregation for its partnership with the Broadway Youth Center, a program of Howard Brown Health Center and its community partners, and The Crib. The Crib is an overnight youth shelter for those between the ages of 18 and 24, which is operated by The Night Ministry.

Education was also a focus. Democratic Illinois state Reps. Sara Feigenholtz, Greg Harris (who attended the convention) and Ann Williams support House Bill 3948, which would help put more teachers of color in the classroom. Illinois reportedly ranks third-worst in the nation regarding teacher diversity.

Democratic Illinois Senate President John Cullerton pledged to support legislation, while Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn promised to sign it into law. Cullerton and Quinn were both in attendance.