

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF TASK FORCE
Subcommittee: Social and Economic Disparities

Meeting Notes
Friday, October 4th, 2019
6:30 PM

Austin Town Hall
Hosted by Dr. Phalese Binion
of Westside Ministers Coalition
5610 W. Lake St.
Chicago IL 60644

MEETING START

Meeting Scheduled to Start: 6:30pm. It began approximately at 7:15pm.

AGENDA

- I. Welcome/Roll Call.** Two members were noted in attendance and thus quorum was not met.

Name	Present
Representative Mary E. Flowers	Yes
Representative LaToya Greenwood	No
Representative La Shawn K. Ford	Yes
Representative Marcus C. Evans, Jr.	No
Representative Delia C. Ramirez	No

Name	Present
Representative Sam Yingling	No
Representative Lamont J. Robinson, Jr.	No
Representative Thomas Morrison	No
Senator Christopher Belt	No
Senator Robert Peters	No

II. Open Discussion.

- I. Dr. Phalese Binion of the Westside Ministers Coalition welcomed everyone. Representative Flowers noted the members on the subcommittee.
- II. Alderman Taliaferro spoke next. He said property taxes were an important issue in his community and thanked everyone from coming out.
- III. Representative Ford said this committee was not supposed to exist, but Representative Flowers made sure the committee was formed. Ford said Flowers had always been helpful to him.
- IV. Senator Harmon, said he was on the larger Task Force but not on the subcommittee, but wanted to come participate anyway. Harmon said property taxes were the #1 issue in his community. Harmon spoke about the administration's proposed progressive income tax to shift tax burden from property to income.

- V. Dr. Binion had taxes of \$9,000 for a house that was worth \$98,000. She had just bought the home and had no idea she was paying for two school districts, even though she didn't have any children. After a year the tax rates start rising up. Her organization, the Westside Ministers Coalition, has always advocated for people. She was glad the Task Force exists and hoped all the members hear her story. She thanked Representative Flowers and said she was going to advocate to make change.
- VI. Representative Flowers spoke next and noted the Illinois Department of Revenue was taking notes on the meeting. Flowers thanked Governor Pritzker for signing the Task Force into law. She spoke to the intent of the Task Force, including the goal of coming up with suggestions to achieve short term and long-term property tax relief. She mentioned a few recent articles in Chicago Tribune and ProPublica that noted investigations found lower-value homes were effectively subsidizing the tax payments for higher value homes creating a regressive system. The study noted that many wealthy areas were already assessed at a lower level, and then appeals were filed lowering the property tax even more. She noted these meetings were to hear from the community and their input and to educate people on what is already happening on property taxes. Flowers next addressed Ford's story about how the subcommittee was formed. Flowers said she pushed for the subcommittee because she remembered how wealthy African-American neighborhoods used to be, but that wealth had been taken away or some people had to just walk away.
- VII. Revin Fellows of the National Black Agenda Consortium and said he had to cover 400 years of history in three minutes. He noted a number of urban plans involving Cook County that have come out without the input of the African-American community. He singled out "Austin Coming Together." Fellows said people needed to get the facts about what is already happening.
- VIII. Anthony Travis said the problem did not start overnight, and solution will not be done overnight. Travis said they needed to pass some laws and a constitutional amendment. In California Proposition 13 protects tax payers by taking the assessor out of the equation. Cook County is an anomaly. Travis called on the Illinois Department of Revenue to be given more responsibilities to deal with assessors and noted Coles County was having problems with theirs. Travis said there were too many units of government, more units than any other state, and was wasting billions on administrators. He said 856 school districts need to be brought down to 102. Travis said \$2.5 billion that was taken away from our community due to property being over-taxed, over-valued. Travis said a study called the Tax Divide said \$4 billion was taken out of the community which could have gone to the schools. Travis called for getting the schools unlinked to property taxes and have one statewide budget like California and Hawaii.
- IX. Profession Lashondra Graves said she was also known as the Apartment Lady due to her non-profit helping renters. Graves said 2.3 million people have been taken to eviction order in 2016. 900,000 were evicted. Even if they don't get an eviction you're considered a high-risk renter that makes renting much harder later. Graves linked property taxes to rent cost - if the landlord is paying high property taxes, that determines market record. If property taxes are \$14,000 a year, that means \$1,800 in rent they're paying. Low wage workers cannot pay for rent or save for

themselves. Graves said every time taxes are raised, evictions rise. Graves said renters should be more involved on the issue, and they should know their property taxes are driving up rent. Families are living together more often, and Chicago has a new term for it – Doubled-up Living. She called on people to act.

- X. Clifton Graham is from the Country Club Hills area. He said he worked for years at the Hostess Plant in Schiller Park. A coworker bought a home in Austin and he remembered him as being proud of his purchase. He said he saw his community in the same predicament as Austin, where people are losing homes, businesses, friends. Graham said getting the assessor out of office is not enough, the system that was overtaxing the African-American community was still happening. Graham called on people to appeal their taxes. Graham saw his taxes go from \$7,000 to \$14,000 and got politically involved in part to fight for his home. Graham said it was depressing to pay more in taxes than his house was worth. Graham talked about the story about New Trier getting a re-assessment due to flood maps. He said he moved his realty company to Indiana because he can rent property for much cheaper.
- XI. Glenda Fulton said she was a renter had buyers in her family. She encouraged people to figure out who their public officials are and tell them their story. Her rent has been going up even if her Social Security was not. She said people had to be active here in their community, and not just in Springfield.
- XII. LaKia Colquitt was fortunate to buy a home at the age of 20, but by 27 she was on the verge of losing her home due to taxes doubling even though home values did not budget. She went into foreclosure but was able to sell her house before they took it. She said her community worked hard to get their property and education, but they were being taken away to give tax breaks for wealthier areas.
- XIII. Obie Wordlaw said he was very impressed with Representative Flowers and that she's been a great representative of African-Americans. He said he was from the West side and lived on the west side before the expressway, and before the medical campus. He's been in business for 30 years. He was also an activist and that's why they want you to get active. He used to live in an apartment with two families in one house. He remembers when they didn't sell homes to African-Americans. In looking back, Wordlaw said people needed to get active. If African-Americans cannot create businesses and make enough to pay for employees, the community would never get ahead.
- XIV. Justina Winfrey was from the 28th ward in Chicago. She said the state hadn't had a Housing Committee since it was decommissioned in 2012. She said in 2013 the state created the economic development and housing commission, but it was decommissioned in 2015. The state does not have an active housing commission. Flowers said the problem was with the housing they had – people could build homes but couldn't hold onto the homes. Flowers called for fixing the problems, long and short term, and the housing should be there. She mentioned issues like redlining and increased property taxes as reasons African-Americans could not access the homes that exist now. Winfrey said there still needed to be oversight. She continued to say that there should be an audit of land records at Cook County. Currently the records are flawed and only go up to 1987. She said her family shared the same tax ID and parcel numbers as other people, and you had to

request to have it changed which included a fee. She explained that the city automatically changed some tax ID numbers, which created issues for people when the county claimed they were not paying their property taxes. She said many people lost their homes in this manner. She also said many people were supposed to receive \$30,000 in federal funds for buying a home but they never received the funding. Flowers said she was going to fight for a housing committee and thanked Winfrey for her activism.

- XV. William Moore was an attorney with a focus in foreclosure defense. He said he worked to prevent the eviction of tenants in foreclosed homes. Moore had a number idea he had for the committee. He called for staying foreclosures where there's an appeal. He said Representative LaToya Greenwood and explained a law that allows someone to sue an abandoned building and take over that property, but they have to pay whatever tax debt is associated with it. He said HB 28 allows non-profits to waive back taxes on property and called on the legislature to pass it. He also called on putting more services, like courts or housing agencies, back in the community and not just make people drive downtown to get anything done. Moore also called for reinstating the Hardest Hit Fund that helped people stay in their homes. Finally, Moore said Cook County should take away the interest they charge on overdue property taxes. Ford asked for more clarification on Moore's idea to stay foreclosures on properties under appeal. He said people lose their homes by not paying taxes or their mortgage. Moore said winning an appeal lowers the cost of overall mortgage bill. Flowers reiterated that the Task Force is to bring a lens of increasing burdensome taxes and find out what's going on in the community. She said four studies and investigations have proved lower income communities were subsidizing wealthier areas. Colquitt explained that mortgages are paid through escrows, which are automatic combinations of property taxes and mortgages, which also automatically increase with the higher property tax rates. Wordlaw said refinancing a mortgage was not enough, but more resources are needed too. Flowers again talked about how lower income homes overvalued, and wealthier homes were undervalued. She said the studies she cited said the county violated the Equal Protection Clause and Federal Fair House Act. These laws and the Constitution are being violated. Ford again told the story about how Flowers demanded the subcommittee existed and knew the community would come out to stand for themselves. Ford was happy how much he learned tonight. Ford said he had been doing real estate for a long time, but never knew how many people lost their homes because of taxes and if they had a fair valuation, they may not have lost their homes. Graham said he experienced this. When he refinanced, they forgot to include taxes in that, and said he had to pay \$10,000 up front. He said he was only able to change it after persistence and his connections to the NAACP which he said an average person cannot go through. They have to go to the banks and get a loan just to pay taxes or walk away. Flowers said it was unfair because they never owed that much in the first place. Dr. Binion said her home value was increased by \$30,000 just because she bought it.
- XVI. Phyllis Logan was helping with the research but has also been in real estate. She did loan modifications and service providers in 2005. Many communities were lost. Bulk of families in Maywood and Broadview due to taxes. They could afford

the loan modification, but they couldn't afford the property tax change. She said they should do research and find the people who lost their homes due to taxes and get them restitution.

- XVII. Willy Mac said the issue was complex and he did not think people were going to agree. He's been on both sides of this issue as a former school superintendent and one of his jobs was to create the levy. He would figure out the costs and the board would approve it. If he was corrupt, it would have been bad since there were no checks and balances on school boards. He also said there was something corrupted in the appeals. He tried to file by himself but got nowhere. He did get letters from 20 attorneys offering their services. He used one, got a deduction, but the attorney took 50% of the reduction. Mac asked how the attorney could get it done when he could not do it. Mac said he's known Flowers for a long time and had faith in her. Mac said they needed to talk about services, too, and called on people to challenge their politicians to explain what services they will provide for increased taxes. Mac said that it was not just about education, as he believed many people knew how bad property taxes were for the African-American community, but they just did not care. He said that when he was at CPS, they took out art teachers and music teachers and guidance counselors, but nothing was done.
- XVIII. Alex Lyons was from the west side. He said he's been on different community boards. He wanted to know how this Task Force was getting around Representative Michael Madigan. Flowers said it had been her pleasure to serve for 35 years and work with Madigan during that time. Flowers said he made appointments to this committee and knew the seriousness of the issue and of the appointments, including her. She said the Task Force would not exist without his support. He said change would take everyone working together, not the will of one politician. Fellows said he was not a homeowner but was an organizer. He said they failed their state representatives by not holding them accountable, and letting lobbyists take control. Fellows also said the community stopped supporting African-American businesses, too, like groceries stores and banks.
- XIX. A representative of the Austin Chamber of Commerce said she learned a lot. She said her rent is constantly going up after years and she understood that whatever happens to the landlord affects the rent.
- XX. Flowers thanked everyone for coming out tonight. She said that people would have the chance to vote on a progressive income tax was going to be on the ballot. She called for people to get involved.

III. The meeting was adjourned around 8:45.