

ROSA PARKS COMMUNITY MEETING MINUTES
HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
November 19, 2022, Iglesia Vida Nueva, 153 Hamilton Ave.

On Saturday, November 19, 2022, Centro Evangelistico Vida Nueva, located at 153 Hamilton Street, hosted a community health fair. As part of the activities, a community meeting was held to discuss housing and economic development.

Steve Kehayes and Aracelis Ruiz welcomed the participants to the community meeting and introduced the partners:

- *Tier I Recovery (Dr. Willy Moody) Grace Gospel Church (Reverend Sarah Anthony)*
- *NJ Community Capital (Marc Dashield)*

Aracelis Ruiz provided Spanish translation for community members.

Marc Dashield provided the residents with an overview of US Census housing data with the following highlights:

- Since 2010, the neighborhood's population has grown by 2,196 persons, or a 37% increase. However, the number of housing units has increased by 558 units or 23%.
- Homeowners with mortgages experience higher monthly costs than those that rent. Mortgage costs ranged from 1,511 – 2,579. The median gross rent in the neighborhood ranges between 1,172 and 1,186. However, residents have indicated that they experience higher rents.

Residents when asked if rental properties are well kept/maintained by landlords and what issues renters commonly face. Community members said landlords do not take care of their properties and made the following comments:

- Housing conditions are generally poor
- Problems with insects and rodents
- Landlords fail to make repairs even when notified
- Language is a barrier in working with the landlord to have repairs completed
- Landlords take advantage of the Spanish-speaking residents
- Pets in the building create issues because people do not clean up after them
- The rents are high (\$2,300 – \$3,000 for three bedrooms)
- Buildings are overcrowded
- Some people can only afford one-bedroom basement apartments, which are unsafe because they lack ventilation.

Residents when asked what renters need to become homeowners made the following comments:

- I do not know how to become a homeowner.
- It is hard to save money to afford to be a homeowner.
- We need training on how to go through the homeownership process.
- Unable to qualify for a home loan because jobs are so unstable, I tend to move from job to job.
- There are no support systems for working poor residents living paycheck to paycheck. I can barely pay my taxes and other expenses. So, purchasing a home is out of the question without some help.
- We need credit counseling and homeownership counseling.

Renters in the neighborhood also identified the following challenges:

- Homes have lead paint in them
- Bad health affects people's ability to hold a steady job, which allows them to pay rent or qualify for homeownership.
- Rents are too high

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- Overcrowding

Community members when asked what support they need as renters or homeowners replied:

- Tenant rights information
- Send the landlords a letter outlining how they must treat their tenants.
- Credit counseling and homeownership training in Spanish
- Support for homeowner repairs
- Support to help purchase small appliances
- Money to buy furniture for the apartment and homes
- Provide assistance purchasing major appliances, one resident told a story about her mother and father having PSEG worry-free services, but that would not cover the replacement of major appliances.

Residents when asked what they need in the community, they replied:

- Clean streets
- Eliminate homelessness
- Remove the drug dealing.
- Public Safety
- Provide better jobs
- Better education – one resident indicated that parents sometimes use a fake address to send their kids to schools outside the neighborhood to get a better education.
- Training in technology and computers
- Training for people to know their rights
- Employment training that includes resume writing, interview skill, and basic business knowledge
- Temporary transportation assistance to help people when they get started at a new job.
- Community Center
- More community gardens
- Community members indicated that they needed to understand how to participate in the political process and how they can get involved.
- Spanish speaking residents wanted ESL classes that was free and provided training that would allow them to actually use the skills learned in their daily lives

When residents were asked what type of services/businesses they would like to see in the community. They indicated that businesses providing healthy fresh foods are missing from the community. In addition, residents wanted a coffee shop to gather and socialize,

Marc Dashield identified manufacturing as one of the larger employers in the neighborhood and asked the residents about their experience getting those jobs.

- Residents indicated that these were not good jobs.

Employees are not treated well at these jobs, and the conditions are bad. Residents gave the following example to illustrate the conditions. (For example, most places do not have heat in the winter and no air conditioning in the summer). The employers do not provide basic services for the employees.

- There is no microwave to warm up food.
- The employers do not pay overtime when required.
- Jobs lack health benefits or other benefits like paid time off

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- The language barrier prevents residents from advancing
- Non-legal residents are exploited.
- No one defines the rights of the Hispanic workers

Other issues raised by the residents include:

- Need for programs to help residents transfer their professional licenses from another country to the US.
- Entrepreneur training to help Hispanic residents alleviate the language barrier.