



THE EAST SIDE UNIFIED HOUSING JUSTICE JOURNAL

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We welcome you to a monthly update providing the East Side with the latest and juiciest news about the past, present, and future of housing justice in our community.

In this newsletter, you can discover untold stories of the East Side, learn about opportunities for activism, and find community resources.

East Side Housing Justice



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A Step Toward Revitalization for the Hamm's Brewery Complex



A virtual rendering of the redeveloped Hamm's complex created by JB Vang Image: JB Vang

by **Bailey Ethier**

While the old Hillcrest Golf Course and Ford Plant have been at the forefront of Saint Paul's development efforts over the past few years, the city recently took a step to begin another large project. After almost two decades of deliberation and planning, the City of Saint Paul has designated a developer for the historic Hamm's Brewery site on the East Side. On January 11, 2023, the Saint Paul City Council officially awarded tentative developer status to [JB Vang Partners](#).

Until now, the Saint Paul [Housing Redevelopment Authority](#) (HRA) has completed the sale and redevelopment of just three smaller parcels within the complex: Saint Paul Brewing, 11 Wells Distillery, and the former aquaponics business that was recently purchased by a private property owner.

Hamm's Brewery was once a cornerstone of the East Side's economy, employing thousands of unionized workers. After the Hamm family sold the brewery in 1968 and other large industry employers left East Saint Paul, a period of economic disinvestment began. During Hamm's most profitable days, the East Side was invigorated by the immigrant population. While immigrant communities continue to maintain the economic vitality of the neighborhood today, the cost of living makes it difficult for working class families to build wealth.

Read more about the historical significance and potential future impact of the Hamm’s site in the June 2022 issue of [East Side Unified](#).

The successful revival of the Hamm’s site as a commercial and residential facility could be extremely meaningful for the East Side community. JB Vang intends to build over 250 housing units on the property, a two-story marketplace in the former brewhouse, and community gathering spaces for cultural events. In the plan, JB Vang designates the marketplace as a space for local entrepreneurs to build equity and generational wealth with direct ownership opportunities. After decades of vacancy, a complex that once provided the neighborhood with economic power could regain its status as a financial asset in the community.

The project is a daunting undertaking, but JB Vang is well-known for its ambition and resourcefulness. In 2021, the HRA released a [request for proposals](#) to develop the Hamm’s site. The request sought development plans that revitalized the historic brewery, maximized housing and jobs for the community, engaged residents in planning, and prioritized equitable outcomes. Prior to JB Vang’s plan, there were a few attempts to redevelop, but those concepts ultimately did not work due to various circumstances, including financial barriers.

According to Laura Haynsen, the city’s Principal Project Manager for the Hamm’s site, “The HRA-owned brewery buildings were custom-built for an industrial brewing process and interconnected through their construction over a century. The layout of the buildings and moreover, the lack of all utilities on site have presented challenges for redevelopment. JB Vang’s proposal accounted for many of the challenges the site presents and proposes a feasible reuse of the space into a mixed-use development.”

Jim Eurchl, the Executive Director of Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services, reiterated the complexity of the redevelopment project.

“These properties are challenging to develop as apartments and retail spaces because they are designed to make beer; there are no floors, just catwalks. If JB Vang pulls this off, it will be an incredibly impressive accomplishment. I think the project will be realized, but it's going to take a lot of money,” said Eurchl.



Aerial rendering of the development plans for the Hamm's site. Image: JB Vang

As [renting costs](#) continue to weigh heavily on the shoulders of residents, the need for affordable housing in St. Paul is often at the center of community development conversations. Housing cost burdens most significantly affect the lowest-income residents in the city and households of color. Over half of Black and Asian households in Saint Paul live at or below 30 percent of the area median income (AMI). And nearly half of renters in Ramsey County are considered cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing. In Saint Paul, there are [22,335](#) renter households with incomes below 30 percent of AMI, but there are only 11,560 units affordable at that level.

Because of its robust housing construction plan, JB Vang's proposal stood out to the city. Out of the five developers who submitted plans, JB Vang provided the greatest number and largest variety of housing units.

Unfortunately, nationwide community development block grant (CBDG) funding has fallen [80 percent](#) since its peak in the 1970s; from \$15 billion a year to just \$3 billion per year. The CBDG program gives grants to local governments for the development of urban communities through the provision of housing and economic opportunity for working class people. Affordable housing is very expensive to build, and without this valuable subsidy, projects like Hamm's must turn to alternative resources.

The Hamm's site is designated as a Federal Opportunity Zone, which is a tax classification that is designed to allow for easier investment in distressed

areas. Their purpose is to spur economic growth in low-income communities while providing tax benefits to investors. JB Vang will have the ability to apply for Opportunity Zone Funding, as well as a variety of tax credits to help finance the redevelopment. Using these tools, JB Vang hopes to deliver three concepts: delivering more affordable housing, creating opportunities to build generational wealth, and the provision of cultural community spaces. To obtain the necessary funding, JB Vang will have to demonstrate the project's compliance with the extensive requirements for different forms of financial assistance.

In their plan, JB Vang includes 159 family-friendly affordable housing apartments, 89 affordable artist lofts, and a variety of owner-occupied housing options. The cost of the affordable housing development alone is estimated at around \$100 million. Financing the Hamm's development is an undeniably intimidating and risky venture.

"The East Side needs attention, but in some ways timing is bad because construction prices are so high. Construction costs have escalated more than inflation in general. There is very little support at the federal level for affordable housing and cities suffer. Khou Vang is going after the right resources, and even though the financial needs are daunting, I don't doubt that he can obtain the money he needs to complete the development," said Eurchl.

The looming expenses of the Hamm's development are deeply intertwined with the economic power of East Side residents. While the community is in need of affordable housing, the accessibility of the new units at the Hamm's site are essential to their efficacy. Construction is only the initial step in the provision of affordable housing. The approval process for affordable housing applicants, especially those in most dire need of assistance, is at minimum an arduous process. Housing service providers in Saint Paul report significant unaddressed needs for deeply affordable and permanent supportive housing. Rental screening barriers and limited unit availability create insurmountable challenges for many low-income residents.

There is a gap between affordable housing construction costs and the rents most people can pay, which frequently creates financial conundrums in redevelopment projects. Ideally, the collection of rental fees help developers generate funds to pay off their loans and remain compliant with grant stipulations. In practice, that money is difficult to generate when rental rates are limited and affordable units are largely inaccessible. Without more generous government subsidies, developers struggle to finance their projects under current economic conditions.

In addition to creating a viable marketplace for local vendors, building and effectively populating the affordable apartments at the Hamm's site will be an incredible feat. Inflation and construction costs are not on JB Vang's side, but their expertise in the development process will serve them well. JB Vang plans to continue their community engagement efforts in 2023, and construction on the 4.8 acre property is set to begin in early 2025.

As the future of the Hamm's site unfolds, East Side Unified will continue to report on the latest developments.

Find links to the HRA's Request for Proposals, JB Vang's Project Summary, and the Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Profile [here](#).

St Paulites Agree Housing is a Human Right



Image: Ricardo Levins Morales

by **David Ackos**

Universal Provision of Housing makes everyone healthier and safer. Stable rent benefits neighborhoods in a plethora of ways. [Housing-first programs](#) have demonstrated drug use, sex work, theft, and other crimes of desperation can be drastically reduced by giving everyone a safe and stable home. Housing as a human right is a radical concept, but it's one the city of St Paul is ready to get behind—if city council doesn't thwart us.

Housing as a commodity hasn't worked for our city. [Racial covenants](#) and [racist housing practices](#) paid dividends for white workers and homeowners through the 20th century and have made local property developers and out of state investors very rich. Owning a home gives me, and other people like me (with generational wealth and supports) an opportunity

to have stable rent in perpetuity. But the wealth gap and current value of housing have made it so that a safe and dignified home is out of reach for anyone who doesn't have access to generational wealth. Our regional prosperity is matched only by our [regional inequity](#).

I saw displacement and gentrification happen in Minneapolis, as my neighborhoods transformed around me and the residents who gave the neighborhoods their character and vibrancy were forced out by rising rents. As a renter organizer on St. Paul's East Side, I've talked to dozens of renters who are either suffering from 30-40% rent increases (even in subsidized housing) or forced out of their homes of many years. This is due to their homes' commodity status. Investors know housing in St. Paul is a very good bet, thanks to the economic engine of our city and the strong need for dense housing, in community, that provides the resources and support we all need. You can read one story of an East Sider who was displaced [here](#).

Sadly, what's good for investors is not good for the rest of us. Saint Paul Voters voted 53% to implement a 3% rental increase cap across the board, to all rental properties in St. Paul. We did this because we knew that stable, amortized increases make everyone safer. We also did this because we knew it would be a small barrier for gentrification and skyrocketing prices, allowing us to put in more supports into place and transform our system of housing before our communities are changed for good.

Over 100 renters showed up at city council to demand city council protect the law we passed. During the public council session on August 24th, we heard moving testimony from elderly renters whose social security payments have not increased at a rate anywhere near rent. We heard from residents who were counting on city council to protect them and keep their housing rates reasonable, and from homeowners who knew stable rent benefits us all. You can listen to the powerful testimony [here](#). City council chose to ignore us and listen to the five or six developers who threatened to hold us hostage by withdrawing their capital if we didn't provide them unlimited rent increases, and therefore unlimited potential income on property resale.

These developers are already receiving millions in public subsidy. Ryan Companies, receiving roughly \$100 million in TIF dollars from St Paul Taxpayers, threatened to bail on their development project in one of the richest parts of the city if they don't get exemptions to rent stabilization. I, and the 53% of St Paul Voters who passed rent stabilization, did not say "as long as it works for the developers." We said 3%, for everyone, into perpetuity. New housing can have initial prices set at any point the owner wants.

Sadly, city council decided to agree with the few over the many and give developers and “affordable housing providers” the handouts they were asking for.

Worse, the newly exempted “affordable” housing uses regional Area Median Income Standards set by HUD. This means residents in low-income neighborhoods have their max rent set based on the median income of our entire metro area. Our metro area’s median income often makes residents eyes bug out when we learn how out-of-reach that “median income” really is. AMI is skewed by wealthy suburbs like Sunfish Lake, which, like our entire metro, rely on workforces of low-income city-dwellers and immigrants to keep our powerful economic engine turning.

The idea that housing can only come from private investment is a lie that benefits the rich. Many [other countries](#) take a robust hand in building and providing exceptional housing. However, we have stuck with our tragically failing dedication to commodity, subsidizing only the private owners, never the residents themselves.

City Council disagrees with the voters. With Ord. 22-37, they told us the “right” of investors and developers to profit is more important than the right of everyone to stable rent and a dignified home.

America is allergic to treating economic needs as human rights, but Saint Paul is ready to move past this. The [American Bar Association](#) and [Urban Institute Initiative](#) agree. We’re past due time to declare housing as a true right for all.

St. Paul is ready to house everyone. We know it will unleash the potential of all of us and allow us to thrive. Developers who need unlimited profits don’t need to be part of the picture. The millions that go to housing subsidy should always stay in public hands in perpetuity, and must guarantee every Minnesotan a safe and beautiful home in a place where they want to live and access the resources and community we all need.

We don’t need to accept housing as a commodity anymore. With a state surplus, we can and must invest in every Minnesotan, not in the rich owners of our communities. We’re ready for something better. City Council needs to catch up.

Originally published in [MinnPost Community Voices](#), Oct. 28 2022

Community Feature: Mother Nature



Image: Tayler Guccione

by Bailey Ethier

At the East Side Freedom Library, we understand that housing justice requires interdependence, solidarity, and accessibility. Sharing stories and resources through the written word is one way we strengthen the presence of those practices in our work.

The community feature column holds value because it allows us to keep record of our cumulative actions and express our appreciation for our neighbors. We are grateful for our comrades, who work with unwavering determination to improve the wellbeing of our community.

Above all, we hope the content in this column helps our community learn from one another, build collective power, and forge a path to ethical housing for all.

Normally, our community features are based on interviews we hold with local activists. We learn about their passions, discuss the role they play within the community, and explore their ideas about justice. This month we chose to spotlight the most influential community member of all time: the mighty Mother Nature. While she wasn't available for comment, her extraordinary work always deserves acknowledgment.

The pursuit of environmental justice and housing justice are inextricably linked. Residential structures account for **20 percent** of global greenhouse gas emissions. The housing that contributes most significantly to pollution is often adjacent to sites of environmental injustice, which exposes residents to health hazards. The way society approaches housing disproportionately endangers people based on their race, class, and ability, while simultaneously harming the natural world. Our current housing practices are holistically extractive; violently attacking the health of both humans and Mother Nature.

The correlation between social injustice and climate destruction is so strong because the two atrocities are ultimately synonymous. Everyone's home is on Earth, our shelters are made with resources we take from the Earth, and the wellbeing of humanity directly depends upon the wellbeing of Ms. Mother Nature herself.

Mother Nature is on the job around the clock and she has yet to take a day off. She provides everything we need to live happily, but unruly humans constantly disrupt her plans and destroy her meticulous work. The human race recklessly takes from the Earth without gauging the long-term impact. To make matters worse, society operates in a manner where humans with the least amount of money and power are unjustly subjected to the negative effects of environmental harm at much higher rates than the wealthy. We created an unnecessary hierarchy in a world where we could very feasibly cohabitate without competing for resources. Our behavior is immeasurably disrespectful to Mother Nature, who shows humanity perpetual grace despite our destructive actions.

If alien life arrived on Earth, it would be undeniably embarrassing to reveal our most shameful truth: we actively destroy the only place we can call home.

Collectively, we have the power to change this reality, and we owe it to our planet.

We humbly offer our gratitude to our most iconic comrade. Thank you, Mother Nature, you are the bees knees.



Image: Tayler Guccione

While we collectively look to her as a leader, a teacher, a caretaker, and a provider, we must remember, Mother Nature is not invincible. She is resilient, and she is regenerative, but she cannot withstand betrayal by her children.

She keeps us alive, and the least we could do is try to return the favor.

Community Art for Justice

Call for artists!

The East Side Freedom Library believes in the power of community art to fuel our fight for justice, and we want to promote your work. If your art speaks to the soul of our community and you want to share it with the people, please send it our way.

Email us at media@eastsidefreedomlibrary.org

In each publication, we will feature a new artist in our newsletter.

This month, our featured artist is Tayler Guccione, a fabulous and talented East Side photographer who often collaborates with ESFL. Tayler finds endless joy in the moments when Mother Nature decides to strike a pose. Take a look at some photos Tayler captured right here in St. Paul.



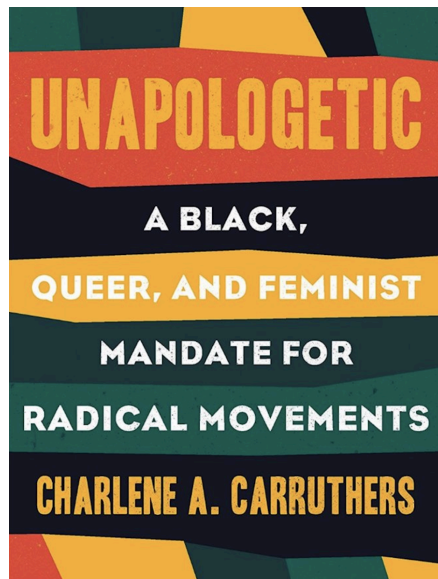






Housing Justice Book Club!

Join the East Side Housing Justice book club, we'll focus on topics ranging from homeownership, co-operatives, rentals, mobile home ownership, land rights and land sovereignty, anti-racism, transphobia, environmental justice, activism, and much more. This is a space to explore and unpack new and old ideas for personal benefit and to build relationships with neighbors and within the community.





In our upcoming session, we're reading Charlene Carruthers' *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*.

Unapologetic highlights black queer feminist organizing as a means towards our collective liberation. Carruthers shares insights from her on-the-ground experiences with a lens accessible to seasoned activists and folks new and looking to explore this realm. From a historical analysis of organizing, accountability, and social media's role, to healing justice, Carruthers provides an entry point for many to begin their journey into activism and an opportunity to grow. The first meeting with *Unapologetic* will be March 22nd, after registering, email updates will be sent with the syllabus and ways to receive a book!

[Sign up here!](#)

Community Resources

HOME Line

HOME Line provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems.

For assistance, you can [send an email](#) to a HOME Line attorney or call 612-728-5767.

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

SMRLS provides free, high-quality legal help to low-income people in critical civil matters, like securing food, shelter, and safety.

For assistance, call 1-888-575-2954 or [apply online](#).

Affordable Homeownership Pilot: Local Housing Incentives Account (LHIA)

The LHIA Affordable Homeownership Pilot will provide grants to support affordable homeownership development, including acquisition and rehabilitation, for projects that best meet the following two priorities:

- **Racial Equity Priority:** create homeownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other ethnic or racial groups that own homes at disproportionately lower rates than white households in the region; and
- **Geographic Choice Priority:** create affordable homeownership opportunities in parts of the region where it is most challenging to do so.

To schedule a meeting for more information, [click here](#).

St. Paul Foreclosure Prevention Program

The City of St Paul has partnered with the Minnesota Homeownership Center to offer the St Paul Homeownership Preservation Program (SPHPP). The program provides support to homeowners within the city limits of St Paul who are experiencing difficulty paying their mortgage or other housing expenses. SPHPP offers foreclosure prevention advising and limited financial assistance.

To learn about the program, call 651-236-8952 or check out their [eligibility tool](#).

Home Help MN

HomeHelpMN is offered through Minnesota Housing to help if you have fallen behind on your mortgage or other housing-related expenses due to the pandemic. Whether it's providing financial assistance or guiding you to trusted resources, they can get you the help you need, at the time you need it most.

To apply or learn more about the program, call 1-800-388-3226 and check out their [application preparation resource](#).

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