



Neighbors for Affordable Housing
Statement to the Board of the Illinois Housing Development Authority
May 18th, 2018

Part I

Hello, my name is Michael Rabbitt. I am here representing Neighbors for Affordable Housing, an independent group of Northwest Side neighbors working to make our community more affordable, accessible, inclusive, vibrant, and compassionate. Our group's mission is to help create affordable housing across the rich "Opportunity Areas" within Chicago's far northwest side, which currently have no family affordable housing.

I am here to speak in support of an application for financing that IHDA's staff has not put on the agenda today: [5150 N. Northwest Highway](#) in the Jefferson Park community. This housing development at 5150 will create 75 units of high quality wheelchair accessible, family housing, including 30 CHA-designated apartments, with a leasing preference for veterans and people with disabilities.

As you may know from media coverage, since this building was proposed in Feb. 2017 with the leadership of the local Alderman---- it has been the subject of much controversy, and has been the centerpiece of numerous stories, editorials, and letters to the editor, in mainstream print, TV and radio over the last 15 months. The 5150 development represents the first Chicago Housing Authority supported housing on the far northwest side, ever, within a community that has historically fought bitterly against the integration of CHA housing since the 1960s, when Dr. King marched in Chicago Gage Park and Fred Hampton was spit on--- in Jefferson Park in fact, to be precise---- for marching for Open Housing.

Today, 50 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, sadly those same dysfunctional, racist, segregationist segments are alive and well on the northwest side of Chicago with a very small, but very loud, faction of white racists who do not want to see 5150 built. Included in your board packet is a 20 page excerpt of over 300 pages of screenshots of the kind of racist and hateful invective that is being posted on social media by opponents of this affordable housing development.

We have reason to believe those people are influencing this process today and are ultimately the reason why the 5150 does not appear on this agenda, despite scoring extremely highly under IHDA's objective Qualified Allocation Plan guidelines. The application for [5150 N. Northwest Highway](#) scored a **73**, a high enough score that this building was certain to get funded based on its objective merits. However, instead of putting this building on the IHDA Board agenda today for approval as would be appropriate under IHDA's QAP.... your staff made a discretionary and corrupt decision to disqualify the 5150 application, despite its high score, using a technicality that does not appear in writing anywhere in IHDA's Qualified Allocation Plan (or "QAP"). The QAP contains the set of criteria that's supposed to objectively guide IHDA's funding decisions and ensure a merit-based process for awarding funding, rather than a political process which allows discrimination to be the actual determining factor.

From media accounts, we've learned that IHDA's disqualification is related to QAP Section XIII. E. "Mandatory Zoning", where IHDA is making new interpretation of what is sufficient progress for an applicant having the rezoning already in place. The QAP language around Zoning has NOT changed, *not a single word has changed*, between the 2017 and 2018 QAP requirements for zoning. And yet, under the same language, mysteriously, some new threshold is being contrived, and the 5150 application is being disqualified because of it.

Part II

I am Rev. Shawna Bowman. I am a pastor on the Northwest side and will make a statement on behalf of my congregation and in partnership with the Neighbors for Affordable Housing.

The decision not to fund 5150 based on zoning status is without precedent and it will enable the forces of white supremacy to maintain and enforce segregation on the NW side, behind the smokescreen of an unpublished and unevenly applied technical disqualification. **We cannot accept this outcome.**

We are here because as the Board of Illinois Housing and Development Authority (IHDA), your job is to advance fair housing - to ensure a fair, transparent, legitimate, and even-handed process, where buildings are awarded financing based on their objective merits, not their political risks. There is evidence that the recommendations before you, submitted to you by your staff, are anything but that.

I implore you, do not move forward in making a final funding decision today. Do not allow yourselves to be manipulated into serving as pawns in political pandering to overt racism. Do not be reduced to rubber stamping actions without evidence of due and fair process. The Illinois Housing Development Authority is better than this, and this Agency and Country deserve more than that. You are called to positions of leadership and I understand how complex and challenging such a call can be and I implore you to claim this call with integrity.

If you ignore this warning, and rubber stamp this slate, not only are you subjecting yourself to a high level of press attention. You are also subjecting your Agency to a fair housing lawsuit that your staff's deviation from due process leaves this Board wide open to.

This past Wednesday, our legal counsel at the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law submitted the first of several Freedom of Information Act Requests, copies of which are included in your board packets. We believe the information that will be turned over to us through this FOIA and subsequent FOIAs we have already prepared will show that IHDA's staff have deviated from normal process and procedure in advancing this slate of applicants to the Board.

You have before you a slate of applicants, some of which score significantly less than the [5150 N. Northwest Highway](#) development scored. **This is illegitimate.** We are here today to protect *you and us* from this course of action. **We are here to protect all of our integrity in this process.**

Please delay making any funding decisions until you, as the Board, can investigate the inequity of this slate and take responsibility for an unpublished guideline that has suddenly been applied to this funding round to technically disqualify [5150 N. Northwest Highway](#).

To clarify, we are NOT asking you to make a decision to fund 5150. We are asking you to investigate to ensure that due process has been followed, that the process has been fair, equitable, and transparent, and that the buildings with the highest scores, not the least political risk, are awarded the funding.

NFAH is an independent group of Northwest Side neighbors working to make our community more accessible, inclusive, vibrant, and compassionate.

Every home a changed life.

