

WE HAVE A DREAM - A WORLD WITHOUT RACISM

APRIL, 2022 - What is SBCLT?

We opened with prayer.

We focused on learning more about South Baltimore Community Land Trust, the organization our group has chosen to support. After reading their vision statement we watched their video. They are working to prove that their residents know best what they need and they work for it. They initially acquired eight properties to develop for affordable housing around the green space they cultivate. They design energy efficient, sustainable houses to make the dream of home ownership possible for people who thought that impossible, benefiting not only individuals but a whole community - growing development without displacement. We heard from those involved in this project, some who will benefit and others working for them, including those of the youth. They spoke about the value of having neighborhood recreational areas and their pleasure at creating these green spaces.

Meleny Thomas, the director of SBCLT, joined us and introduced some of the leadership team. Carlos Sanchez mentioned that he joined *For Your Voice* at thirteen, explaining how his respiratory issues were exacerbated by unhealthy neighborhoods. He is committed to educating people on environmental justice, working for zero waste and promoting composting as he develops community understanding and trust. Area youth launched a zero waste challenge, which SBCLT accepted and then helped create Baltimore's first Fair Development Plan for Zero Waste which the City Council adopted in 2020. Looking through the lens of equity to inform decisions about housing, trash and other services, and which neighborhoods are neglected, SBCLT works as a tool to reclaim land and begin to create more just systems. They will vet businesses that have a heart for greener infrastructure, offer such things as free recycling which would have been out of reach, and reclaim land.

Sophia Stanka, their intern, reiterated that creating housing and supporting basic needs gives residents security and control of their future and community, so fighting against gentrification by getting money and grants is essential. Lisa Clayton, their accountant praised SBCLT who has raised almost \$3,000,000 and are close to being fully subsidized, key because a lot of funding is tied to prior success. They hope to break ground this summer with their first duplex. Meleny shared the flier of the first homeowner education evening about zero waste and safe community development (April 24th) and welcomed people to that and future such events.

To grow a strong harmonious relationship with St. V's and SBCLT, we agreed we need to be open, listening first to discover how we can best support them. We need to show up, learn together, share our diverse skills, encourage each other, and fill in gaps by offering our advice and expertise, especially legal support where needed. There are many pressing areas SBCLT is fighting for and against, creating sustainable plans and working for environmental justice. When homes are built, they will hire a "Stewardship Coordinator" to focus on community needs. St. V's can contribute with legal advice (particularly contract, housing and environmental law), environmental and housing policy experts, financial support, and trade people who would be available to support homeowners.

SBCLT has ten properties under development, purchased two more, and are looking for three more. They will build this year with an architectural team committed to community equity work. The houses will be "passive houses", highly energy efficient. The goal is for people to pay less than 30% of their income for their housing.

We expressed our gratitude to Meleny and her team for joining us, giving us such a thorough understanding of SBCLT, and especially for the tremendous work they are doing!

We reported that the Parish Council unanimously approved the town hall and the letter to Archbishop Lori and Bishop Lewandowski from the entire parish.

We thanked Jack Schmidt for his tremendous work on the legislation we supported which he will summarize in a follow-up email, and thanked those who took action.

We ended with prayer.