

7 **show up for their meeting**

there will be a "community engagement process". maybe it's sincere, or maybe it's the bare minimum to meet a requirement. don't assume anyone's motives. show up. pay attention. try to sit near people you don't know. if something you see or hear makes you mad or worried, say so. speak your concerns, out loud, in front of people who have shown up. if someone says something shitty, write down what they said and find out their name. ask questions you want answered. if there is no time in the meeting to ask questions, the community has not been engaged. pay attention. stick around afterward if you can.

6 **correct the record: tell your own story**

people who want to improve a place they don't spend much time in might paint a distorted picture. they might list *current characteristics of your neighborhood* as goals for how they want to improve it. call bullshit. use social media and in-person opportunities to expose racist and classist code words. celebrate the tacky decorating, the frequent use of porches. the "folkways" (traditions) of your neighbors are important. the aesthetic goals of redevelopment are not. if outsiders say something that is untrue, correct the record. say for yourself what's good about your neighborhood and what you think needs to change.

Some Actions To Take

- * get the names of people, businesses, & organizations involved. contact them.
- (see page 4)
- * think deeply about what you want to happen (as opposed to what is currently happening). say it.
- (see pg 5)
- * find ways to tell the story of your neighborhood, from your point of view. encourage others to do the same.
- (see page 6)
- * go to an official meeting.
- (see page 7)
- * have your own meeting.
- (see page 8)

Pick Your Part

you can engage with whatever part of the problem you want. focus on YOUR abilities. work with neighbors; different people have different superpowers. combine your power to build power. know/care for each other; maybe come up with a group name ;)

BUILD A TEAM (example jobs):

- researcher** - read/summarize official documents. find data. fact check.
- space-holder** - set up a place for neighbors to regularly talk. always show up, and welcome anyone else who does. maintain a contact list.
- communicator** - design fliers. write press releases. run social media accounts. answer the group email.
- representative** - bring fellow neighbors' concerns to places/meetings where they can't be or aren't welcome.

MY NAME IS AMANDA and i made this zine because i am a volunteer organizer in my spare time (what's left over after doing paid work to survive). i've spent 4 years trying, meeting, discussing, emailing, studying, holding space, calling bullshit, and building relationships with my neighbors, and i am still learning how to impact my surroundings.

**let's connect. email me:
a.r.huckins@gmail.com**

**merely
one
micrometer
closer
to fair**

toward
SPEAKING UP
and
SELF-ADVOCACY

OR, DEMOCRATIZING THE
MACHINES OF "PROGRESS"

YOU JUST FOUND OUT

about a plan to change your neighborhood.

you & your neighbors won't get anything out of it and won't even get a say, but someone else will make a lot of money. this really pisses you off.

information is scarce and what's out there reads like an ad. it's hard to tell who is in control and why.

you feel like there's nothing you can do. this sucks.

**okay, now take a breath
and read on...**

Getting Information

if you disengage, you give up information. plug in any way you can to keep your community informed.

find the best version of what you don't like & talk to it. it might feel like all developers, all banks, all city government are The Enemy, but these are the players. to start, get to know the credit union instead of the big bank, Urban Development instead of campaigning elected officials, small builders instead of giant development firms. ask questions, take notes.

if you are effective opposition, decision-makers will try to co-opt you. if they finally invite you to "the table", it's not an honor, it's tactical. being allowed to participate doesn't mean you have to act like /agree with other participants. participate as you.

going forward

*engaging with the problem
can be the beginning of
a struggle. what's next?*

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ask questions. demand answers.

someone who is attempting to change your neighborhood should communicate with you about it, but they might not, so communicate with them, try to determine who is actually leading the project, contact each organization that is named in promotional materials, ask how/why they are involved, ask any other questions you have, express your concerns, if you are satisfied with their answers and responses, great, if they offer a way to enter the process long-term, take it, but if they side-step your questions, direct you to someone else, or tell you they've got things covered, demand a way to enter the process long-term, restate your questions.

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“do this, not that.”

depending on what stage of “actually happening” a redevelopment plan is whether you say “hey, does anyone want to grab a burger and talk more about this?” right after the “official” meeting or you make a facebook event for a week later, make a point of gathering in a neighborhood space to get folks’ honest opinions. it doesn’t matter how many people show up to any meeting, be ready to listen as well as speak. at the beginning of your meeting, go around the circle introducing yourselves & saying why you showed up. at some point, pass around a contact info sheet so people have a way to reconnect later. if the official “community engagement process” didn’t reach enough people, keep meeting and letting new people who show up know what’s happening.

“no”, keep steering the conversation like (or even say) you are only saying towards the small, cheap, easy improvements everybody agrees on. your experience is expertise; make sure they hear it.

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your grassroots meeting(s)

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Ooops, You’re the Rep

you ended up being the person who went to the most meetings & now you’re a default representative.

remember to keep pointing to the people who aren’t being engaged. maybe you got on the board, in the room, & on the radar of people with power. remind them often of who they still aren’t hearing from, because you only speak for a part of the community. continually advocate for significant power shifts. **check your ego (and other people’s assumptions).** own that you are not exceptional & are a volunteer. acknowledge that regular people with no training can do important work. challenge assumptions about who is “qualified” to lead. encourage neighbors to claim their own power.

speak up

*because you know more
about the subject at hand
than the people who are
controlling the conversation*

Stepping Back/Moving On

this is a note on taking care of yourself, from personal experience:

this work is often demoralizing. the more you learn about how development works, the harder it is to imagine that we can reclaim self-determination in our communities. take care of your spirit. nurture relationships that provide mutual emotional support. take your time. **we DO have power, but seizing it requires a lot from us.** the systems where power lives are literally built to keep us out. showing up is time-consuming. visioning a better future takes imagination & hard-to-muster optimism. honor small victories. **you decide when to rest or change course.** allow yourself to notice when you’re ready for a change. make it.