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Local Group SW Action Holds Rally Urging D.C. Government to Designate Land in SW for a Community Land Trust





WASHINGTON, D.C. – Last Friday, June 3rd, SW Action held a rally at 4th & M Streets SW to advocate for the parcels, located at 425 and 375 M Street, to be purchased by the DC government and transferred to the Douglass Community Land Trust.

More than 100 people attended the rally, echoing the calls of the more than 900 people who have signed SW Action's petition calling on the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, John Falcicchio, to purchase the parcels and turn them over to Southwest residents for community-led development. The lots have been used for the DC State Fair, Saturday Farmers Markets, and Friday Night Markets, among other events. These markets have more Black and Brown businesses than the Wharf, a nearby SW development.

Miranda Chien-Hale, a member of SW Action and an attendee at the rally, described the lots at 4th & M as "One of the last remaining undeveloped parcels of neighborhood land and one that is core to our connectedness as a historic community in Southwest. We showed up to express and imagine our vision for keeping this central space accessible and inclusive for everyone - a place where we can gather, celebrate, live, shop, garden, relax, walk and so much more. DC government officials have an important opportunity to listen to the needs and desires of southwest voices and support community-led development through the purchase and transfer of the 4th&M lots to Douglass Community Land Trust. We can work together to develop in a way that ensures the well-being of everyone and protects residents of different races, ages & income levels in the neighborhood."

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are non-profit organizations that own land and lease access to it at affordable and below market-rate prices for housing and retail. CLTs have been proven to prevent gentrification and the displacement of residents and small businesses. A CLT at the site would provide the opportunity for residents to control and steward the land while also allowing the possibility of permanently affordable housing and retail space.

In describing the potential loss the lots would have on SW, SW resident Jeremy Coats said, "The lots at 4th and M are the heart of the SW community. Losing them would be a loss to everyone who enjoys the weekend markets and other events and celebrations. In a time when it's hard to leave home without spending money, the lots provide a central, no-cost space for neighborhood families and friends to come together any day of the week. The space is invaluable to members of the SW community. I'm excited about the possibilities for the space if placed in community hands."

The unique location and size of the lots makes it an ideal space for gathering, markets, and festivals--something not found anywhere else in the neighborhood. The lots being collectively owned, rather than privately owned, will ensure that their future will align with the interests and needs of residents, while also serving as an instrument for justice and equity.

As currently proposed, the redevelopment of 425 M Street SW would include limited affordable housing and few family-sized units in an area that has seen expensive developments increase in the last few years. SW Action has put out a petition to ensure that the parcels do not become

another unaffordable development in SW and that the ideals of the Southwest Neighborhood Plan to be an “exemplary model of equity and inclusion” come to fruition.

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