

Affordable housing shortage in Detroit creates dire conditions for seniors

By a WSWWS reporting team
18 August 2016

Eight years after the 2008 economic crash elderly Americans face continuing hardships due to low incomes and the lack of decent and affordable housing. A large percentage of senior households find themselves in low income or very low income status due to the paltry amount of Social Security they receive.

In 2014 the Social Security administration reported that half of all people age 65 and older received less than \$14,425 a year from Social Security. Among elderly US Social Security beneficiaries, 22 percent of married couples and about 47 percent of unmarried persons rely on Social Security for nearly all their income.

Conditions are particularly dire in the Detroit area, where, nearly two years after the settlement of the Detroit bankruptcy, the Democratic city administration, with the backing of the federal government, has embarked on a program of mass demolition under the guise of blight removal.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team recently spoke to residents and their relatives at a senior complex in Southwest Detroit.

Across the Park senior housing is an 11-story facility in Southwest Detroit. Reporters found the deplorable conditions in senior housing, and the shortage of housing for seniors in Detroit are directly related to the mass of foreclosures in the 2008 recession, the loss of auto jobs, and the bankruptcy of Detroit.

The reporting team encountered a retired autoworker sitting in front of the building trying to cool off. He worked 20 years in the plants until a serious non-work injury left him unable to continue. He said: "Here I am. I lost my house to back taxes. I was living in a hotel. But I was beaten and robbed there. So I had to move.

"Even the elevators and hallways here do not have air

conditioning. I hope they get it together. I don't think this thing is right. Unfortunately, it's like that and a whole lot of people in here are retired auto and city workers."

The struggle elderly people face to keep a roof over their heads has corresponded to the worsening of conditions in Section 8 or government subsidized senior housing set aside for low-income retirees.

The American Civil Liberties Union recently filed a lawsuit against the city of Detroit stating Detroit residents were either overcharged on their taxes for houses that were plummeting in value, or not informed of programs that could have helped them. The city refuses to budge, saying tax relief would violate the terms of the Detroit bankruptcy settlement crafted with the crucial support of the trade unions, who handed over millions in pensions and wages to the city's wealthy creditors.

A major banner covers the web site of the city of Detroit. It says that 10,000 homes in Detroit have been demolished since Democratic Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan took office two and a half years ago. The city plans to demolish at least 8,000 more, the culmination of a decades-long process of foreclosures of once owner-occupied homes in Detroit.

The so-called blight removal has led to a precipitous drop in low-income housing units in the city. According to an Urban Institute report there has been a drop in affordable housing units for extremely low income renters in Wayne County, comprised of Detroit and the surrounding metro area, from about 48,000 units to about 24,500.

The retiree explained that there was little help left for seniors because of state-level budget cuts: "I got bronchitis, high blood pressure. The government should provide money but the state cut me off my

Medicaid. So with Medicare only it takes \$30 out of my pocket every time I see a doctor.”

“They told me I make too much money and would only get \$10 worth of food stamps, which does nothing for me,” he said. “My income is only \$1,243 a month. There is nothing upstairs in the refrigerator so I will have to do without for the next three days.”

Mariah Howard, 23, a young worker, spoke at length with reporters. She was enraged at the conditions inside the building. She said: “My uncle lives on the tenth floor. He is 69 years old. My aunt is 58 years old and stays here when she cares for someone. My father used to live here, too, so I have been coming around here for a long time.

“It is not right when you pay your rent on time. You should have everything. The apartment management says that air conditioning is working but you don't feel the A/C blowing with your hand. The temperature feels like 90 degrees inside, real hot. It is terrible.

“There are a lot of old people living here with oxygen tanks. Half the people must use walkers and do not have a car. People breathe normally when they leave the building but their breathing is worse when they re-enter.”

When a local television station did a nightly news report on the lack of air conditioning at the HUD-financed senior building, residents reported they had been sweltering in dangerous conditions since the heat wave hit at the beginning of July.

Mariah said: “Management told us someone will come out to fix the A/C tomorrow, but people living here have been going without air conditioning that works right for at least two years. We'll see if anything gets done. I was not here at the time but they tell me the apartment manager actually ran out the back door when Channel 7 came.

“I think it is terrible that old people end up like this after working their whole lives. Even as a young person I can see that this is not right. You just don't treat people like this.”

A WSWS reporter asked Mariah what she thought about the presidential elections. She held both palms up and said: "They are both working together in the end, Democratic and Republican." She signed up and said she was looking forward to attending an election meeting for Socialist Equality Party candidates Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice

president.

The authors also recommends:

Low-income retirees in the Detroit-area face abysmal housing conditions

[8 August 2016]

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