Adam Hare’s Narrative

“The tenants are low-income families and individuals. Many tenants have lived in the area for decades, and they plan to continue living there for decades to come. This is their home. The tenants are proud of their community and of one another. They understand that nothing is perfect, and that you usually get what you pay for; in this instance, however, at the absolute least, the tenants at paid for livable conditions. That is not what they received.

A few years ago a developer bought the buildings in Southeast Washington. Since that time, residents of those buildings have experienced a gradual degradation in their living conditions. At first, it was simply a lack of upkeep by the management company: peeling paint, old and fraying carpets, and an occasional infrastructure problem, the types of problem that come with older buildings. As the months progressed, however, peeling paint gave way to cracks in the walls and the foundations of the buildings. Old carpets became soiled with rodent feces, mold, mildew, and roaches. The small plumbing leaks became a putrid pools of water emitting a noxious, permeating smell.

At the beginning, while the problems were minor, the tenants reached out to the developer to ask for assistance; the response was anemic. As the situation moved from bad to worse, the tenants reached out again. The developer made minor fixes to the property—installing locks that were broken easily and fixing the symptoms of a problem without addressing the underlying cause.

As some tenants moved out—yielding to what amounted to constructive eviction—squatters moved in to take their place. Vagrants broke into the basements of the buildings, used drugs, had sex, defecated and urinated in the common areas of the buildings, and left as destructively as they came. Windows were broken, their screens were slashed, and the doors to individual apartments were kicked in. The security of the building was compromised. Still, the developer hardly did anything.

The housing violations built up, snowballing to a point where the tenants reached out to several non-profit organizations seeking assistance. At that point, the conditions were nearly uninhabitable and the response from the developer, untenable. Even a modicum of upkeep would have prevented the conditions in which the tenants found themselves.

The developer maintains that they want to move the tenants out of the buildings so that the developer can raze the buildings and build high-rise condominiums. The developer maintains that the tenants will be allowed to return to the newly-built apartments. The company even showed the tenants several relocation units owned by the developer. The tenants did not find those units desirable. One can imagine why.

That notion that the developer wishes to displace the tenants may or may not be true. What is true, however, is that the tenants today live in squalor. They deserve better. They are willing to negotiate with the developer to reach an agreement regarding either a right to return or a buyout, but they demand that their current living conditions be improved. All they want is a habitable home.”