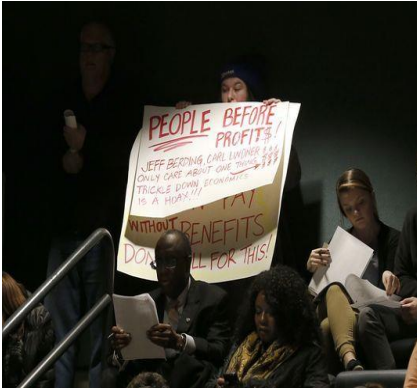


Opinion: A West End stadium isn't a good deal or socially just

Chelsea Bennett and Margaret A. Fox, Opinion contributors Published 11:13 a.m. ET March 28, 2018



Buy Photo

(Photo: Sam Greene/The Enquirer)
CONNECTTWEETLINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE

What does displacement mean in relationship to affordable housing or a new soccer stadium? It happens when a single or multi-unit residential building is torn down and the people living in it have no affordable housing relocation options. The place they called home, that was affordable, safe and convenient, is purchased for commercial or upscale housing that the displaced individual or family cannot afford.

Last November, the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC) held its annual Fall Planning Conference. Denominational representatives from MARCC member judicatories (denominations) gathered to study several social issues. Following group discussions and caucusing, they ranked five social concerns. One of the top two concerns was displacement/affordable housing/homelessness.

The term displacement, with reference to housing, has been around for quite some time starting with President Eisenhower's signing of the Federal Aid Highway Act 1956. The building of an interstate highway system in Ohio began in 1957, followed by urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. Both impacted housing in our metropolitan region, usually in predominantly minority-populated neighborhoods, such as the West End in Cincinnati, made up of residents with moderate incomes. People and families were displaced by what was referred to as "progress."

What is different about displacement today? It's context. Displacement always impacts the poor and working poor first and more severely. Now, it includes people on fixed incomes, middle and upper-middle-income individuals and families, while the nation and the southern and mid-western regional poverty rates remain high. Incomes have been relatively stagnant for the past 30 years. Income distribution continues to skew toward upper-income levels.

We would like to think that in the 21st century that individuals and families, no matter their circumstances would have affordable and safe housing to live in and good schools for their children to attend. Therefore, it remains confusing and contentious, when we try to understand within the context of regional poverty and displacement, why another stadium is being considered for Cincinnati.

When we look at the preferred location of a potential Futbol Club Cincinnati stadium in the West End, a low-income community, we scratch our heads in wonderment – why haven't we learned from our local history, i.e. displacement in Over-the-Rhine, Walnut Hills, North Fairmont, Northside, University Heights-Fairview and Clifton. The list of affordable housing options continues to decrease.

If a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) is signed, what recourse does a neighborhood have if FC Cincinnati falls short on fulfilling the CBA? Can FC predict how many additional parking garages will be built, or how many more businesses recruited for the surrounding stadium area? What happens when affordable housing units in the "mixed-use plan" do not happen? I'm thinking of promises made regarding Hope VI, The Banks, Over-the-Rhine. FCC

representatives say “sue us” if they do not fulfill the CBA. Remember the Anna Louise Inn? Western & Southern Financial Group dragged out the Anna Louise Inn court case until the inn’s low-income Housing Tax Credits for its renovation were in jeopardy of expiring and its ability to pay attorney fees depleted after being counter-sued by Western & Southern.

The potential Cincinnati Public Schools Board of Education swap of public land in exchange for an equitable tax payment and a questionable Community Benefits Agreement with FC Cincinnati misses the mark, especially since the children in the West End may be displaced in the next 10 years. MARCC believes that this is not a good deal or socially just contract for the people in the West End and the people of Cincinnati.

Chelsea Bennett is president of the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati. Margaret A. Fox is the executive director of MARCC.



Chelsea Bennett *(Photo: Provided)*



Margaret Fox *(Photo: Provided)*