

July 29, 2010

Letter to the Editor, Chicago Tribune

Misguided Muckraking

Your July 25th article entitled "*Zoning shift OK'd after nearby home bought*" seemed to be a series of innuendo, speculation, and gossip, searching for a legitimate story. The implication that Hispanic Housing Development Corporation manipulated an established community-vetting process to achieve zoning approval for Boulevard Court Apartments was disturbingly inaccurate, without evidential basis, and patently untrue. The fact is that existing, "as of right" zoning for the property at the time of purchase by Hispanic Housing, would have permitted a building of almost 17,000 square feet, while the rezoned property permitted an incremental increase allowing the construction of a development which respected, in design and scale, the classic architecture of this historic boulevard planned by Daniel Burnham.

In good faith, we provided your reporter, Ray Gibson, extensive files from both legal firms which represented the buyer and seller at the closing transaction for the property. Hispanic Housing did indeed inadvertently pay the 2004 and 2005 real estate taxes on the adjoining property, while we were waiting for the tax subdivision by the Recorder of Deeds, and although the attorneys had anticipated this and created a Reproration Agreement, the document was subsequently overlooked by all parties to the transaction when the real estate tax bills were issued six months later. This has since been corrected.

It is inaccurate to characterize Boulevard Court as Hispanic Housing's first for-profit venture. As a community developer, our broad goal is to help neighborhoods thrive and prosper – this includes housing that is mixed-income and housing that serves working-class populations. Any successful community needs residents with a broad range of incomes. The original development concept's intent was to capture neighborhood families who were improving financially, but unfortunately the economic downturn changed everything.

It is also important to note that Alderman Colon did not hesitate to support the all-affordable concept for the completed development situated adjacent to his home. Many aldermen generally express verbal support for affordable housing, but few would encourage it right next door.

For the record, Rey Colon has been my friend since before he became an Alderman and will hopefully remain so, long after his political endeavors are over. He is a good man who pursued a career of public service for several primal reasons, including the drive-by shooting death of his younger brother over 15 years ago in Logan Square. That primal event redirected his career to neighborhood-based youth work, first at the Logan Square

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Boys and Girls Club and then at the YMCA. Rey won his aldermanic seat against enormous political odds, and I believe he has served his ward and constituents well during his tenure. Rey has consistently demonstrated, social commitment, creativity and courage during his professional career. As a former Vietnam infantryman, if I were in combat, he is the kind of person I would want beside me.

During the past 34 years, Hispanic Housing has served Chicago's neighborhoods and its residents well by providing crucially-needed, high-quality, safe affordable housing for families and elderly residents – improving their daily lives and future prospects for economic success. Today, Hispanic Housing manages 4,000 apartments which serve over 11,000 residents. The organization has established a national reputation for excellent and creative community building. Never in its 34-year history, has Hispanic Housing been tarnished by any sort of scandal or negative press. Your spurious article may have served to taint our reputation by speculative innuendo. This article was lacking in journalistic integrity, and was surely not news fit to print.

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