***Shifting the Cultural Narrative in the U.S. Housing Crises***

City Life/Vida Urbana

**Project Narrative**

City Life/Vida Urbana is a grassroots community organization committed to fighting for racial, social and economic justice and gender equality by building working class power. We promote individual empowerment, develop community leaders and build collective power to effect systemic change and transform society.

**Team members**

Mike Leyba - City Life/Vida Urbana communications coordinator

Terry Marshall - community organizer/founder of Intelligent Mischief (a civic media hack lab)

Nene Igietseme - youth worker/MIT urban planning student

Ruth Schappelt - former case manager/MIT urban planning student

Dara Yaskil - former housing advocate/MIT urban planning student

**Background: The issue**

City Life/Vida Urbana has been supporting tenant organizing to preserve housing affordability and resist displacement since their inception in the 1970s. Since the foreclosure crises post-2007, CLVU has worked with tenants and homeowners facing eviction and foreclosure to stay in their homes. Now that the numbers of foreclosure has gone down, CLVU realizes they must also challenge the popular narrative that the housing and foreclosure crisis is over. CLVU asserts that there is a new housing bubble forming and a return to “bubble economics” is not the solution.

**Project Goals**

The ultimate impact of this project is to promote the organizational goals of promoting the use of housing for people, not profit; a vision of decommodification of housing and other human needs. To get there, we know we need to create a new narrative about housing that combats the dominant one. We specifically need a narrative that ties together CLVU’s three campaign areas: 1) an anti-investor campaign – many of foreclosed properties are being bought up en masse by investors looking to sell the houses when land values rise so they can turn a profit or raise rents to displace current communities, 2) fighting gentrification in the most vulnerable Boston neighborhoods, and 3) a post-foreclosure eviction defense campaign to keep former homeowners in their homes past foreclosure with the goal of a long-term and sustainable solution. This project should also be empowering to the CLVU membership and leadership, tie in personal narratives and powerful data points, and reinvigorate the movement!

**Design project candidates**

*This list is the product of multiple brainstorms that occurred over the span of two weeks:*

1. Like a card magic trick, the idea of the fair market is deceptively convincing. However, with card tricks, we continue to be amazed by magic even when we know there are slights of hands that hide the truth. With housing, the results of the deception are much more devastating. There is no magic; the fair market does not exist. It is all deception and slights of hand.
   1. Could set up magic trick tables at actions?
2. Carnival games promise a fun time and a big prize. However, how many of us have ever won a carnival game? How many have actually gotten the big stuffed animal prize? Very few. Why? Because the carnival games are rigged so that people don’t win. Similarly, the housing market promises a giant reward, but the system is set up so that people don’t win. Unlike a carnival game, however, people’s lives savings and hard work go into the process of “playing the game.” Well, a fair market is supposed to be fair; not a carnival game.
   1. Could create a carnival at an eviction vigil or at Dewey Square or in front of Fannie/Freddie offices
   2. Exaggerate and give hula hoops to bankers and tiny hoops to regular people
   3. Game of musical chairs - chairs disappearing
   4. Hall of mirrors to see how distorting the effects of the market can be
3. What would it take to re-launch the Occupy movement? How could it be a grassroots movement led by people of color? The membership of CLVU might be able to best answer that question if we facilitated a “hackcupy” [hack Occupy] session. Participants would be able to address the failings of the Occupy movement and perhaps create something more sustainable that would make a statement about capitalism and the decommodification of people’s needs
4. The 1% versus the 99% is a strong meme that sprang from the Occupy movement. Could we re-appropriate/revitalize that meme for the housing crisis? Could we use a powerful data point (such as the one the undergirds the 99% meme) to create a meme that supports our narrative? Are there supporting data visualizations that we could create?

There were also other, less fleshed out ideas that we discussed:

* Pop-up housing
* PSA of houses just wanting to be homes (maybe use the 6:1 housing stock to homeless population stat?) Is housing for People or for profits? (like “Does capitalism work” art installation piece)
* Partner with Artists:
  + Projections of people in houses
  + “Does capitalism work?”
* A home is central to a person’s life -- no matter who you are. What if we passed out papers shaped as a home and people could draw and write about what home means to them. This would help convey the value of ‘home’ in a person’s life, the connection one has to their home and the identity that is formed from ‘home.’ We can tie this into a larger narrative.
* People who do the work get pushed out (capitalism is actually about the people “doing the work” getting the reward) This is a Plutocracy
* Incomes declining+Increasing housing values = contradictions - if housing values continue to rise - 90% of people who work in East Boston will be pushed out in 4 years; This is your problem - if you fall within these income brackets; you can’t live here
  + Need a sense of crisis to gain a sense of Agency
  + Grievance + Sense of Power + Sense of Righteousness
* Families vs. Flippers
* 10 commandments of housing justice - solidarity economy version of the housing market
* The system doesn’t work without you
* Explaining the Process/timeline (it’s part of a big cycle):
  + foreclosure/eviction
  + investors come in
  + gentrification

**Project Proposal**

The strongest idea came for joining our first two ideas: we will work towards a large Carnival event in the Spring that has games and activities that link the foreclosure crisis, markets, and capitalism to a rigged game that we all play. The Magician will play a role at the Carnival of making people believe in magic of the games - i.e., deceiving the middle class.

For the fall deliverable, we plan to hold two “mini-carnivals” in East Boston and Dorchester, sites facing increasing pressure of foreclosure and gentrification. The events will serve a dual purpose: 1) increasing visibility and creating buy in for the larger event in the Spring and 2) creating a co-design process that includes CLVU members and potential members to gauge their response/reactions to the narrative created by linking the housing market and system to carnival games.

Part of our deliverable will also be a media/implementation strategy for the larger event in the Spring. This might include a website, talking points, an instagram/vine strategy, etc. - whatever makes the most sense as we continue to co-create.

**Timeline: Key Activities and Roles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Phase I: Project Planning and Design** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY* role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
| (incl Site visit, Brainstorm, Project Proposal and MOU) |  |  |  | Mike | Nene | Terry | Ruth | Dara |
| First Site Visit | The Co-design team met at CLVU and had a session exploring current dominant narratives, narratives we believed, and fissures in the narrative | Oct 3rd 10am | 1pm | provide background info | facilitate/participate | facilitate/participate | participate | participate |
| CLVU staff meeting | Mike vetted some of our ideas with the CLVU organizing team | Oct 7th |  | Relay project ideas |  |  |  |  |
| Team meeting | Discussion of feedback from CLVU organizers | Oct 8th |  | Relay feedback, discuss more project ideas | Participate/update Terry |  | Participate | Participate |
| Team meeting with CLVU organizing staff | Fleshing through project ideas that resonated | Oct 14th |  | Facilitate | Participate/update Terry |  | Participate | Participate |
| BTA Leadership Collaboration | To encourage CLVU member-leaders to be a part of codesign process. | Oct 18th |  | Pitch, lead discussion |  |  |  |  |
| **First Project Iteration** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY***  **role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
| Secure collaborative partners | Artists, non-profit/labor orgs, space needs, base-building groups, community leaders | Oct. 21 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Game/Attraction design | With artists, design game/attractions with relevant data and framing to illustrate deceptive nature of capitalism | Oct. 21 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hold first “mini-carnival” | In either Grove Hall or East Boston |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hold second “mini-carnival” | In either Grove Hall or East Boston |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Create media/implementation strategy for potential Spring event | Decide what social/mainstream /popular media channels we want to publicize or engage people with |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Second Project Iteration** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY***  **role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
| (incl Midpoint Evaluation) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Incorporate feedback from first mini-carnival into design of second |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Continue development of media/implementation strategy for Spring event |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Final Project Iteration** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY***  **role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| **Final Presentation** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY***  **role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
| Cohesive media/implementation strategy for Spring event |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Case Study** | **Description** | **Start date** | **End date** | ***MIKE***  **role** | ***NENE***  **role** | ***TERRY***  **role** | ***RUTH***  **role** | ***DARA***  **role** |
| Draft |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Final |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | **total hrs:** |  |  |  |  |

**Budget**

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)