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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Social Justice Committee
Monday, February 27, 2022 – 6:30PM
This meeting was conducted via Zoom

MINUTES

CB8 Members Present: Erica Bersin (Public Member), Sarah Chu, Saundrea I. Coleman, Ed Hartzog, Gregory Morris, Rita Popper, Barbara Rudder, Wendy Machaver (Public Member)

1. Presentation by JustFix.Org

1. [JustFix](#) is a nonprofit organization that develops tools to help individuals and communities fight displacement and achieve healthy housing for all. Their motto is “Technology for Housing Justice.”
2. Sateesh Nori, Executive Director, presented on behalf of the organization. Nori previously worked in housing litigation for Legal Aid Society across the five boroughs. He was joined by Board of Directors member Stan Morse, the Lead Organizer for the Justice for All Coalition. Detailed bios can be found [here](#). For disclosure, Co-Chair Saundrea I. Coleman recently joined JustFix as a member of their Board of Directors.
3. Problems that tenants face in NYC are both structural and informational.
 - i. Structural
 1. Even if you know your rights, housing court is a difficult place to fight for your rights. Will you have a lawyer? Will you be at risk for immigration enforcement? How does one navigate the complexities of housing court?
 - ii. Informational
 1. Need to know what kind of housing you live in, all the responsible agencies, their programs, and the laws that relate to your specific type of housing.
 2. Who is your landlord? What do they own and are they connected to other landlords? How do they treat their other tenants?
 - iii. JustFix was created to provide tools to tenants, organizers, and legal advocates to fight displacement and achieve stable healthy housing for all, leveraging the power of data and technology to support individual and collective action for housing justice. The goal was to make the troves of public data as accessible and transparent as possible.
 1. After conducting focus groups, they determined that a smart phone app was the most accessible form of technology that they could build to serve the community.
 2. Public Data Access

- a. NYC has Open Data, a website that makes public agency information open to the public, but the city databases are not connected to each other. DOB not connected to HPD, not connected to the courts.
 - b. JustFix created software to link these data for its users. Once a user types in their address or the name of the landlord, the app will pull up everything the city has on that entity and information connected to that entity. For example:
 - i. What does your landlord own?
 - ii. Do they evict lots of people?
 - iii. Are they a mom-and-pop organization or a giant corporation?
- iv. Important legal decision: [Javins v. First National Realty Corp. - 138 US App DC 369, 428 F. 2d 1071 \(1970\)](#)
 - 1. Landlords have the right to collect rent, but tenants have the right to habitability. Every tenant has the right to fight for repairs even if they owe rent or have other issues with the landlords. Repairs make us all safer. We are all in it together.
 - 2. Right to counsel and the Right to Repairs: Unintended Consequences
 - a. If you are a tenant and you fit within a certain income, you're entitled to a lawyer through public defense organizations. In NYC, over 1000 people work with tenants to represent them. However, these attorneys/legal staff are typically limited to the most urgent cases. If you're not facing eviction, it's hard to get an attorney to address repairs.
 - b. JustFix is more necessary than ever before to help tenants to address repair issues outside of court. These tools were developed through focus groups where tenants have expressed "we will risk eviction to get repairs" and "we want repairs - not money damages." Tenants can hold their rent to get a judge to hear their repair issues, but that strategy puts them at risk for eviction.
- 4. JustFix.org App Functionality
 - i. JustFix can draft a letter that is sent via USPS to the landlord through the app. The user simply checks off their repair needs and inputs some information. This function simultaneously documents the requests and asks the landlord to address the repair. Nori offered a live demonstration of this tool.
 - ii. JustFix also has a bad landlords list know your rights information and can send your rent History via text.
- 5. Stan Morse and Saundra I. Coleman, Board of Directors
 - i. Morse discussed how he used JustFix to organize residents at the Queensbridge Houses. Using the app, residents submitted 200+ letters of complaint that provided evidence for a lawsuit against NYCHA.

- ii. Through JustFix, Morse’s coalition was able to send letters to the highest levels of NYCHA and he has been able to use it as an advocacy tool to hold elected officials accountable.
6. Q & A (Paraphrased and summarized for brevity and clarity)
- i. Q: Rent strikes, when residents put their rent in an escrow account until repairs are done, have been effective in the past. Have you ever used it and what were the results?
 - A. Nori: In the past, rent strikes were very common and tenants would work together to collect rent and hold it in escrow. Landlords adapted to rent strikes and created tenant blacklists and they are no longer safe for many tenants. Since the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act (HSTPA) passed, it has not been as common because of all these hurdles. We encourage tenants to file HP “Housing Part” lawsuits as a group, this way, tenant coalitions don’t have to hold the rent.
 - ii. Comment: I used JustFix to send my landlord a letter and that was the first time that the landlord realized I was serious. It was the simplest tool I ever used. The app helped me take actions I didn’t even know I could do.
 - iii. Q: Regarding rent strikes and fears of being blacklisted, what are landlords afraid of? It’s never been a level playing field. When do the tenants get power?
 - A. Nori: One of our goals is to use tech to give power to people. Technology gives us the opportunity to connect with huge numbers of people - that’s the goal of JustFix. They have money but we have numbers.
 - iv. Q: Your technology has gathered a lot of data - can you use it to produce research for policy purposes?
 - A. Nori: I frequently meet with city council members to show them the data in their jurisdictions. One of the biggest users of JustFix is the city government. They are looking at their own data from our side to provide detailed maps, understand trends, and using that to target solutions. JustFix will be adding public health data (ER visits, linking asthma rates to mold) to our dataset to connect the health risks of bad housing.

2. **Old Business** – None

3. **New Business** - None

This meeting was adjourned at 7:25 pm

Saundrea I. Coleman and Sarah Chu, Co-Chairs