

Reckoning in Boston Documentary Movie Screening and Panel Q&A

Hosted by City of San José Housing Department

November 18, 2021, 6pm – 8pm

Panel Q&A Session Notes

Panelists: Kafi Dixon, Producer, and James Rutenbeck, Director

Moderator: Elizabeth Guzman, City of San José Housing Department

The City of San José hosted a moderated discussion after the virtual documentary screening of “Reckoning in Boston.” Panelists gave updates and answered questions from the audience. This summary is meant to capture the general thoughts and sentiments expressed during the discussion, not a verbatim account of all that was said.

Panelists:

- Important to not attach the word racism to the individual, rather to the policy, and systems.
- It has been difficult to get to a fruitful conversation about inclusion. There is still resistance to having the Co-op on the land. Imagine what could have been if they (the City of Boston) had agreed to allow us to use the land. They would have gotten ahead of the conversation and we wouldn't be stuck in this cycle.
- The nature of interacting with the government and its controls is exhaustive and depressing. It builds resentment and anger. It would take a toll on anyone. So not only do you have to navigate these systems, people need to manage their own energy and mental health in the process. It is overwhelming.
- A lot of the problems and inequities are tied to housing. Housing is a basic need. Our country does not see it that way. Yet, we hear about “American exceptionalism,” and we are suppose to be this great country. But reality does not match that picture. It is important to remember that the United States is a very young nation. We are governed by a capitalistic and violent system that oppresses us. There is a lack of recognition of that.
- Working on a new, short film on universal basic income. This system offers to eliminate the indignity of waiting in line instead providing cash to people to spend money as they see fit.

Audience Comments and Questions:

- This film affirmed my advocacy. It was also a mirror. I've worked 30 hours a week for 3 years in advocacy. We have a humanitarian crisis on our hands. What remedy do we have?
- Who owns the lot shown in the film? What is the eviction policy? What are the plans to distribute the movie?

Panelists:

- There is a simple answer but an inability to find a resolution.
- The lot is considered blight. Part of redlining history. Blighted lots were taken for tax abatement. The City of Boston (City) decided to keep lots for community gardens for

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and offered them up to homeowners to purchase empty lots next to their homes. Urban farms have been a tool for gentrification. They since pulled that policy. They are able to revoke leases to CBOs at any time. There is a wave of tax credit properties that are set to expire soon. Now development is in overdrive.

- The City wants the lot to be built for housing. So, they are making people go through extra hoops to get a garden built. Why do we have to go thru another public process? What is the danger in actually hearing from and working with the community? It is dehumanizing and has capitalistic tendencies.
- The film has been shown 85 times. It will air on PBS January 17th and can be streamed 30 days after that.

Audience Comments and Questions:

- How is Carl doing?

Panelists:

- Carl is struggling, but he is hopeful. He is still does not have stable housing. He has been on the Housing Authority's list for housing for 12 years. He is no longer at Harvard. Intellectually, he was ready. Socially, it was difficult. He has also had long haul COVID symptoms.
- Carl's story illuminates how policies do and don't work, regardless of age or health. Policies are either missing or lack transparency or access. This is the failure of municipalities.
- There are great programs out there. For example, the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. You may not know about it. Program requirements are very strict of when/how/where to sign up.
- There seems to be a lack of effective policies. Is that intentional or is it oversight?

Audience Comments and Questions:

- I've spent 40 years in jail, since I was 12.
- Equity in policy is a sham. If I don't see myself reflected in the policy, it is a sham.
- In City of San José documents, I am a low-income, marginalized, person of color who lives in a low resourced neighborhood.

Panelists:

- Frustration can be perceived as anger, but it is likely frustration around lack of acknowledgement. Important to sit with frustration and understand where it comes from. It needs to be tended to and healed.
- One can reflect energy back into community and find satisfaction in legacy you leave behind.
- Our country's history is to respond to unrest with violence. Unrest occurs when there is a lack of basic needs, like in South America. How do we tend to communities before it explodes into unrest? What happens when we stand up? Some people threatened by loss of what they have known America to be.
- Talk to homeless people, find out how they ended up there. Connect with them. Engage in the participatory process around housing.
- At least there are people engaged in process in San José. That is far more than we have in Boston.

