

RESOLUTION No. 2019-

***RELATIVE TO OPPOSING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DE PAUL AND
COMMUNITY MISSIONS
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROJECT IN THE HIGHLAND AVENUE AREA OF THE CITY
OF NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK***

BY:

Council Member Ezra P. Scott, Jr.
Council Member William Kennedy

WHEREAS, there is a great need to devise economic development initiatives in the City of Niagara Falls that will improve the quality of life, raise the standard of living and empower the residents who reside in the predominately African American community located in the north end of the city in the Highland Avenue area; and

WHEREAS, leading statistical indicators show that the African American community has had a devastated economy, with the community's unemployment rate high and poverty rate rampant; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2013- 2017 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 1,665 of 2,665 of the Highland Avenue's Tract 202 residents or 63% live below the U.S. poverty level and 43.6% of African American residents in the City of Niagara Falls live below the U.S. poverty level; and

WHEREAS, the poverty level of African American residents in the City of Niagara Falls and the predominately African American community located in the Highland Avenue area are exponentially higher than the national average of 25.2%; and

WHEREAS, there are numerous Brownfield sites located in the 560 acre region of the African American community on Highland Avenue which also contributes to a weakened employment and a weakened tax base as well as environmental problems that exist; and

WHEREAS, the City of Niagara Falls continues to lose population with a decrease in its more affluent areas, of 243 residents in DeVeaux and a decrease of population of 159 residents from LaSalle; and

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WHEREAS, the Highland Avenue area gained 463 residents during the same time frame according to the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey; and

WHEREAS, a community meeting was held on Thursday, March 21, 2019, 7:00 p.m. at the St. John AME Church, 917 Garden Avenue, which was the first time that the residents from the Highland Avenue community were notified about the DePaul, Community Missions project; and

WHEREAS, at this meeting, which was well attended by homeowners and residents from the Highland Avenue community, it was discovered that there were other meetings held without the knowledge of the Highland Avenue community; and

WHEREAS, after the presentation was made by DePaul and Community Missions, residents from the Highland Avenue community emphatically rejected the supportative housing proposal and the DePaul group was told to look at other sites in the city; and

WHEREAS, the Highland Avenue area has an over-saturation of rental properties – Hope VI, Jordan Gardens, Cornerstone Village as well as the Estella Apartments and Wrobel Towers which are less than one mile away from the Highland Avenue community; and

WHEREAS, the costs to rent at the proposed facility are extremely high at \$625 a month for a one bedroom apartment and \$725 for a two bedroom apartment to be located in the poorest area of the city which will enhance the transient nature of this project; and

WHEREAS, original use for the property which that the housing is proposed for was for the revitalization of the old Unity Park, now Cornerstone Village called for low income, single family housing, which was to promote homeownership in the Highland Avenue community; and

WHEREAS, the only individuals who benefit from projects of this nature are the property developers, contractors, management team and organizations who exist due to the economic hardships of the poor; and

WHEREAS, the above referenced groups come into impoverished neighborhoods to work and leave that community taking their tax dollars with them at the expense of the impoverished community; and

WHEREAS, the supportive housing project will add even more poverty and transient people in the Highland Avenue community; and

WHEREAS, the supportative housing plan proposed will lower the property values of the current homeowners who have resided in the community for decades, destabilizing the properties immediately surrounding the facility, bringing even a greater criminal element to the faithful church goers of St. John AME Church, which will be located right across the street from the facility; and

WHEREAS, the supportative housing will quickly become dilapidated housing with tenants who will bring more criminal activity, drug activity in the Highland Avenue community as well as a whole host of social ills that will further threaten any hopes of the vision for revitalizations that the residents of the north end community have; and

WHEREAS, there are more suitable areas in the city where the DePaul, Community Missions project can be located instead of the heart of the African American Community, where the residents are working so hard to transform; and

WHEREAS, residents of the African American community have rejected this proposal outright at the March 21, 2019 meeting to only have the DePaul and Community Missions organizations to ignore the wishes and concerns of the residents of the area in an effort to ram this project through in an attempt to ignore the voices of an entire community; and

WHEREAS, the Highland Avenue community proposed an agenda to this current administration before the Mayor was elected in 2007, and

WHEREAS, this vision has not changed and is as follows: “In order for our city to move forward, economic development initiatives must be devised to empower all people to achieve improvements in the poverty rates, unemployment rates, literacy rates, life expectancy rates, Infant mortality rates, job creation and retention, small business development, neighborhood development, recreational development, infrastructure services such as parks, crime prevention, education, affordable housing, entertainment, the arts and cultural centers, highways, streets, sewer and water services as well as developing our community as a center for commerce, cultural, industrial and heritage tourism; and

WE THEREFORE URGE YOU, as the City’s chief Executive Officer to provide leadership, economic development initiatives, such as New York State Certified apprenticeship programs and professionals that will promote economic self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance through employment, small business development, turning Brownfields into Greenfields, shovel ready sites for developers to develop, and home ownership in and for the African American community, as your administration must empower and provide equal opportunity in the area of economic development, which is inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of the African American community; in order to change lives and improve the living conditions in our community; thereby empowering all people to achieve the dream of economic sustainability and stability in the City of Niagara Falls; and

WHEREAS, the DePaul, Community Missions proposal fails to meet the vision of the residents of the Highland Avenue Community.

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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT this City Council of the City of Niagara Falls, New York expresses its strong opposition to the DePaul, Community Missions Supportative Housing Project being located in the Highland Avenue Community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT the City of Niagara Falls, New York Planning, Economic Development and Community Development Departments work with the DePaul and Community Missions organization to find a suitable site other than the one being proposed; and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the appropriate HUD offices, the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal and NorStar Development Corporation.