

William A. "Bill" Lawson
4042 Glen Cove Drive
Houston, Texas 77021
September 10, 2007

VIA COURIER

Mr. Bill White, Mayor
City of Houston
800 Bagby
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Mayor White:

By now you know that when you hear from me (and that is a bit rare), I am not asking for anything for myself or my family. I have been, and still am, an advocate for the powerless. Sometimes that means for the poor, the ethnically, medically, educationally, or by age or gender oppressed. Occasionally (and that is a bit rare), I find some people who are not in any of the above categories, but they are not seen or heard by the people in power.

That is what this letter is about.

I am hearing that the City of Houston offered, then voted in Council, and therefore guaranteed, some citizens in South Central Houston, protection for their homes by not opening a hike and bike trail immediately behind their homes. Then after that Council vote, these citizens were sued by the city using its eminent domain authority to acquire the property, and install the hike and bike trail behind their homes anyway. Of course, I recognize that power as a prerogative of local government. But, a promise is a promise—and there has to be some justification for this abrupt reversal of attitude. Unless there are some facts neither they nor I know, I would support their resisting of the City's violation of its agreement with them.

I am not a lawyer, and would not presume to speak to either their legal rights or the legal authority of the City. But if, in fact, the City promised, and voted, to put the hike and bike trail in another location, not behind their homes, then the City should live up to that commitment.

These are not impoverished people. They are predominantly African American, but this is not a case of racism. So here is what I would propose to you, sir.

I think people of good will and good intentions can talk through most disputes. And for half a century, honest, face-face negotiation has been my style of problem resolution. So would you have your office find a time when the leadership of the South MacGregor Civic Club and I could come in to talk to you? You may want to include Councilwoman Ada Edwards in the discussion; this is her district. I should think one meeting with us should clear the air. Did the City promise these taxpayers and citizens, by vote of Council, that the trail (which

opens their homes to crime-ridden Dixie Drive) would not be placed behind their homes? Is the City now suing them to take the land by eminent domain for the purpose of placing the trail behind their homes?

Mrs. Tomaro Bell is the President of South MacGregor Civic Club, Bernard L. Middleton and R. Michael Lee are members of its Board of Directors, and are owners of two of the homes in question. Thus, the four of us would request an audience with you.

Please, Mr. Mayor, at least hear these citizens, law-abiding, home-owning, tax-paying citizens, and then determine the proper, ethical course of action. I may be permanently damaging my acceptability or credibility with you and with the City of Houston. And if I am appealing on the basis of false or incomplete premises, please correct me. But I have to ask, because I still consider it my ministry to be an advocate for the rights of all.

Thank you for reading all this stuff.

Sincerely yours,

William A. "Bill" Lawson