



Why South Works Needs A Community Benefits Agreement

by Anna Johnson

My parents moved to the southeast side (South Deering) when I was 7 yrs. I've been in this community for a number of years. I shop, attended school in the community- I'm an alumni of Bowen High School, and now I'm an advocate for whole community- South Chicago, South Deering, Jeffery Manor, and a little bit in Hegewisch. I'm a member of the Coalition for a South Works CBA, which is made up of 40+ community organizations, schools, churches, businesses, and block clubs pursuing a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA).

I'm fighting for a CBA for the U.S. South Work Site, which is the old U.S. Steel site, because the things that attracted us- our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, are being taken away. Before, everything was easy to get to. Everything was in one location. Neighborhoods were quiet with plenty yard space. Family members were nearby. Now, the South Chicago YMCA closed on October 31, 2017, and Metra has made ser-

vice cuts in the community. We have continued cuts in education. It's not just at the beginning of the school year, but during the school year, too.

Years ago, we built up this area. Things have been strategically taken away to push us out. Our grandparents worked so hard to get their homes. For some people, the only thing they have to hand down to their children and grandchildren are their homes. They're pushing us out and we are being pushed into areas where we don't want to live in. Areas that are polluted. We are pushed into areas where we are slowly dying. Can you say... Gentrification? Because that's what it is.

The southeast side is unique in its diversity, which should be preserved and celebrated. Many families have been in the community for 20, 30, 50, or even more than 70 years. We know what we want and what we don't want.

A CBA is a legally binding, written agreement between the developer and members of the community. A CBA will

give community residents a way to be ensured that the community will get the benefits we want, and what we need to prosper- to live the American Dream.

A CBA means that the people who are going to be directly impacted by the development will have a say in what they want and not be displaced. At the South Works site, we are demanding affordable housing, environment protections, ensure local jobs, education, training opportunities and support the local businesses.

With the CBA, it's a strong insurance that we will have what attracted my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. We want to bring back a sense of community, with everything in one place, prices that are not out of reach, and everyone is free. Something that my children, and my children's children will be able to benefit from in years to come.

I can remember we used to shop locally. For us, it was on Commercial Ave, get our clothes and our shoes. I went there to get my hair done for my 8th grade grad-

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uation. When I was in Bowen, I saved up enough money to go to the local jewelry store and buy a 'Mother's Ring' for my mother for Mother's Day. When I was planning my wedding, I bought my wedding cake from a bakery on commercial, it's no longer there. We could go to the department store and local businesses to buy whatever we needed. Then, go a few doors down to get our groceries. That was our community. I want to bring that back.

I want Commercial and South Works to be our new downtowns- with more local businesses, bakeries, a movie theater, outdoor cafes, and youth and senior centers. We only want environmentally friendly companies to open facilities in and around the community.

I don't want to head towards

a ghost town. Things are being taken away from us and they are trying to push us out. Make it unaffordable for us to live in and open businesses in the community. They want to put in what they want to put in. They don't want what we've built up. They tear it down, then give it back to us. Our parents and grandparents worked so hard. We want to pass it on to future generations.

The South Works site will be the largest local source of jobs. We have young students. Some of them don't know what's outside the community. Because of the lack of resources, there are some teens whose future has already been written for them. With a CBA, the young children, teenagers, young adults will have a whole slew of opportunities. High School students and adults will be able to get

local jobs. They won't have to travel hours away for a job. Parents will be assured their children are safe. It will be right here in the community. Families will be able to spend more time with each other because they won't have to travel so far to get to their jobs- spending hours in the car or taking 2-3 buses to get home from a job.

We want quality training and education so residents are qualified and ready for the jobs. We want to have the workforce- our residents, our adults, our teenagers- to be the work force that employers pull from. We want to keep the money in the community by supporting local businesses. We know local businesses are more likely to hire locally as well.

We want affordable housing because we want to make sure that residents can stay in the

community that they built.

I know that the CBA will make our vision a reality. With ASE and the Coalition members, I know the residents and surrounding communities will have a chance to succeed, prosper, and build a future for ourselves, our children and future generations. I'm for progression, but not gentrification. If you're going to build in that community, it belongs to that community. No more empty promises or broken dreams. We need these things in writing. We need a CBA for South Works.

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Anna Johnson is a member of the Coalition for a South Works CBA and member of the Coalition's Jobs Committee.