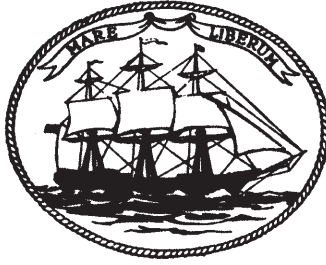


The



Day

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Real People Pay Dearly For NLDC Land Grab

Susette Kelo

It takes a special combination of people and place to make a neighborhood. Fort Trumbull was a neighborhood with a lot to offer, but if I'm forced by the New London Development Corp.'s use of eminent domain to move from here, I don't plan to stay in New London. It's just the place I want to be, but by transferring eminent domain to the NLDC, the city government has proven its disregard for the people who live here.

I grew up in southeastern Connecticut and bought my house at 8 East St. in New London in 1997 because it was just what I was looking for: great view of the water, affordable price, nice neighbors. I enjoyed fixing it up and making it a home for my family. I invested a lot of time and energy in this house and in my neighborhood. I worked to clean up the neighborhood.

Neighbors have told me that the place never looked so good.

In 1998, a real estate agent came by and made me an offer on the house. I explained to her that I was not interested in selling, but she said that my home would be taken by eminent domain if I refused to sell. She told me stories of her relatives who had lost their homes to eminent domain. Her advice? Give up. The government always wins.

So why is it that the city and the NLDC want to kick us out? Some say the citizens who live here now-or used to live here, before their homes were bulldozed-are low-income, uneducated slum people. I grew up in this area, and I beg to differ. New London may not be the hip little city that Claire Gaudiani would like to live in (after all, she doesn't live here), but there are those of us who happily chose to live in New London.

If the taking of our property were for a bridge, road or

firehouse, I would be prepared to sell without a fight. I don't mind doing my bit for the public good. But the government should not be able to force me to sell my home for just any purpose. I was told that the NLDC wants my land to market it to a developer for projects that will "complement" the new Pfizer facility in our area. This is for private profit, not the public use. Nearly all of my neighbors' homes have been bulldozed. We are one of two families left on the block. We are the public, so how can the destruction of our homes be for the public good? Most people work a good deal of their lives to buy their homes, and they should not be forced out when someone wants the land for a nonpublic use.

It's been almost three years now since I was originally told that the NLDC would have my house. They don't have it yet; but now that the city has handed over its eminent domain power to this private group, we're not in a position to refuse to sell, as we would with any other private party.

The NLDC claims that it is working for social justice and a better community. But you don't achieve social justice by treating people this way, and you don't get a better community by kicking everyone out.

Through the actions of the NLDC, New London has successfully developed one thing: a bad reputation. It earned this because of its history of schemes to strip the neighborhood away so they can start all over again, remaking the town according to their own vision. But it is not their place to tell me what to do with my property.

You cannot trust a city that would recklessly hand over the power of eminent domain to an unelected, unaccountable group like the NLDC.

If I'm not safe in my current home from this kind of government abuse, I wouldn't be safe in any home in this city.

And neither will you.

Susette Kelo an Institute for Justice client and is one of 10 property owners who are suing the NLDC, the city of New London and the city redevelopment agency over the eminent domain land-taking.