

Flint residents again face home foreclosures if they do not pay for poisoned water

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Once again thousands of residents in the city of Flint are being threatened with home foreclosures for failing or refusing to pay for water, which is still tainted with lead and other toxins. On Tuesday, an unelected financial board voted unanimously to overturn a temporary moratorium, paving the way for the city to issue tax liens on the homes of 8,000 residents who could then face home foreclosures.

The action is the latest provocation against working-class residents in the city of 100,000, which has been devastated by decades of plant closings by General Motors, followed by the lead poisoning of its water supply three years ago.

The Receivership Transition Advisory Board (RTAB), a body appointed by Republican Governor Rick Snyder, has unilateral power over budgetary decisions. Under the RTAB, the city remains, in effect, under emergency management without a formal emergency manager. In making its decision to overturn the moratorium, the board was acting on behalf of the powerful financial interests who control the city's bonds and other forms of debt.

David Sabuda, Flint's finance director, declared, "This is a cash flow issue," claiming the city could lose up to \$2.3 million in revenue if residents were not squeezed to pay outstanding bills. The RTAB claimed it was in the city's "best interests" to get residents to pay, either willingly or with the threat of foreclosure.

The city finance department will put outstanding water bill balances on the July 17 tax bill. Residents will have until February 2018 to pay. If the tax bill is not paid in full by February 2020 Genesee County will put a lien on the home. The water bill will then be paid either following the sale of the property to the Land Bank or through foreclosure.

Flint residents immediately took to Facebook to

denounce the decision. Teresa said: "This is another slap in our face!!!" April wrote, "They don't want to resell the homes, they have bigger plans—they want to clear out the city and get rid of the people by any means."

Vikki commented, "MSNBC and all the other corporate media doesn't care about us. We were a good story for a minute and now we don't exist!?" Trevias added, "Governor Snyder needs to be in chains and an orange jumpsuit?!"

Randal wrote, "They're raising everything so people will move out. They won't get my houseyou watch and see....I will be the last one standing. I owe 300 bucks for taxes for my house...TOTAL....they won't get me."

Kynan stated, "I've been saying this for the longest. RTAB are the ones who really run Flint, Michigan. Dictatorship at its finest!!!?"

"Why are our bills even higher now?" said Charli. "Last month, \$88...this month \$99...frickin' ridiculous!!! I just spent \$60 to wash our clothes at a Burton laundromat....which we've been doing 2 years. Uuuggghhhh! And they wonder why people are walking around angry?."

Linda added, "Mayor claimed to care about the people when running for office, but now it's all about stealing people's homes because she knows she could have stopped it if it was about the residents and not the money?."

Three years after the switch over to the polluted Flint River—a criminal act designed to boost the profit interests of investors and private companies involved in a pipeline construction project to the Great Lakes—residents still face a devastating public health and economic crisis. Their home values have plummeted and their life-savings have been wiped out.

Adults and the elderly face a series of health problems and the city's children confront life-long challenges with learning disabilities due to lead poisoning.

All the promises of relief, from the local and state level to the Obama administration, have amounted to little or nothing, with thousands of lead water mains and service lines remaining. Claiming that lead levels have fallen to safe levels—in fact no lead in water is “safe”—city officials have resumed mass water shutoffs and Governor Snyder is ending the bottled water distribution program.

To cover up her own responsibility, the city's Democratic mayor, Karen Weaver, said she did not agree with the decision of the state-appointed financial board but would nevertheless implement its decision. She said the RTAB “felt it was necessary” because the city was being forced to “purchase at a much higher price along with several other costly financial obligations...”

In both Flint and Detroit, water is being used as a valuable commodity to pay off wealthy bondholders. The switch-over from Great Lakes water, long supplied and treated by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, to untreated polluted Flint River, was part of Snyder's effort to deny Detroit its largest water customer and accelerate the governor's plans to throw Detroit into bankruptcy. The 100-year-old publicly owned Detroit water system is now under the control of the Great Lakes Water Authority and on its way to being privatized.

In the face of deep popular opposition, the City Council voted for a one-year moratorium during a session in mid-May, with resident after resident refusing to pay for poisoned water. The measure, however, was a cynical political maneuver, worked out by the Democratic-controlled city government, working with the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP. The measure did not provide debt forgiveness to those being charged for poisoned water and, in any case, city officials knew the measure would be overturned by the unelected financial board.

At the City Council meeting Monday night Mayor Weaver and city council members engaged in further political theatre, blaming each other for the crisis, while continuing to ignore the concerns of residents present in the audience. Neither the mayor nor the city council said a thing to residents about the meeting of the RTAB

that they knew was taking place the following day.



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