

## Opinions

# There's plenty we can do about displacement in D.C.



A flag football game underway at Anacostia Park near the 11th Street Bridge. (Greg Kahn/For The Washington Post)

by Scott Kratz June 22, 2018

*Scott Kratz is vice president of Building Bridges Across the River, which planned, fundraised, built and manages the Town Hall Education Arts and Recreation Campus (THEARC) and which will manage the 11th Street Bridge Park.*

In conversations across the District, and particularly in the neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River where I work, there is a very real and heartfelt anxiety that gentrification and the displacement that accompanies it are sweeping across the city. And there is a growing hopelessness that these outcomes are inevitable. As the District's population has grown by [more than 100,000 over the past decade](#), neighborhoods are being transformed in real time.

The Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum explores this topic with its exhibit "[A Right to the City](#)," which explores five decades of changes in the nation's capital. The exhibit documents the rich and varied histories of U Street, Southwest Federal Center and Shaw, and is a must-see for anyone who cares about our city's future. We won't know where we are going unless we understand where we've been.

During these community discussions, there is a sense that larger economic forces are at play and that we have little power to change their course. There is even talk that we should not invest in neighborhoods of need and continue decades of disinvestment.

I thoroughly reject the idea that there is nothing we can do.

Ward 8 nonprofit [Building Bridges Across the River](#) is working on a new approach to invest in neighborhoods that prioritizes people over profit. The group is partnering with the District to turn an aged-out freeway bridge into a park for healthy recreation, environmental education and the arts. The [11th Street Bridge Park](#) will physically stitch together a city that has long been divided by the Anacostia River. From the beginning, the bridge park has been driven by the community, with local residents determining park programming and art installations and even choosing the design team. With rising inequality and increasing divisiveness in our country, the 11th Street Bridge Park will serve as an important place for residents and visitors alike to come together, celebrate and learn from each other.

But the bridge has become so much more than a park.

We have expanded our scope to include community-development efforts to ensure that current residents who have helped shape this park can benefit from it the most. Working with nearby residents, civic associations, business owners and city officials, we created an [Equitable Development Plan](#) for the park's surrounding neighborhoods. It outlines how the park can partner with other local nonprofits already active in Wards 7 and 8 to combat displacement and create equitable and inclusive economic opportunities. Recommendations were made in four key areas: workforce development, small-business enterprises, affordable housing and cultural equity.

Since announcing these strategies, we've founded the Douglass Community Land Trust to provide permanently affordable housing. We've started monthly tenants' rights workshops. We fund a Ward 8 Home Buyers Club that is helping more than 60 renters east of the river become homeowners, building generational wealth. We are partnering with a local nonprofit to provide loans and technical support to nearby small, black-owned businesses. We kicked off the first of many construction workforce training sessions to ensure local residents can build the park and secure jobs at nearby sites. In the fall, we will begin a pilot program to get children savings accounts, a critical need in a ward where half the residents are unbanked or underbanked.

The park is working to change the way our city invests in infrastructure. We have secured more than \$56 million in investments to date that are being made directly in the community. This is about the same amount that it will cost to build the park. Imagine if we invested a dollar in the community for every dollar spent on bricks and mortar. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but this multisector approach has become a model across the city and country, inspiring similar equity plans in St. Louis, Philadelphia, Dallas and Los Angeles.

Building Bridges Across the River has a 13-year history of serving communities east of the river. With the 11th Street Bridge Park, it has forged a new way of investing in communities of need, prioritizing resident voices and a vision that all residents should benefit from the District's growing prosperity. By working intentionally, early and with the community, we resolutely believe residents have a right to be heard, a right to stay and a right to thrive in this city that we call home.