Gentrification: Gainesville's "urban removal" problem

Many residents of Gainesville's historic neighborhoods, especially African-American neighborhoods, are concerned about ongoing gentrification.

As neighborhoods and their buildings age, they naturally need maintenance and repair. Over time, the challenges of keeping up with aging buildings and neighborhoods can become too much for some owners or landlords, and buildings can begin to fall apart. Pernicious long-term practices, such as redlining, which led banks to deny loans in certain, typically African-American, neighborhoods, have made matters worse. Oftentimes, this cycle of neighborhood-wide disrepair leads to reduced property values. Urban homesteaders or property speculators can then buy property at a discount.

This leads to neighborhood revitalization, but for whom?

For gentrification to occur, the architectural character and quality of the homes must attract new owners who want to fix them up. On the other hand, when homes are purchased and demolished, or allowed to fall down, known as "demolition by neglect," another phenomenon is at work. In this case, new owners are attracted to a neighborhood's location, not to its architecture or urban history.

When this process of decay and renewal drives long-time residents away, largely because they can no longer afford to live in their own homes due to increased rents or taxes, some describe the result as gentrification. Others describe it as "urban renewal" or, more cynically and perhaps more accurately, as "urban removal."

To learn more, visit our resource page, or suggest additional resources at neighbor@gainesvilleneighborhoodsunited.org