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Still Reeling: What Does a Just Recovery Look Like?

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Eight months after the most destructive wildfire in California history, many Sonoma County residents are still struggling to recover. Long before the Tubbs fire, widening inequality, increasing poverty, and the expansion of low-wage work had undermined economic security for low and middle-income residents. Moreover, building in high fire risk areas, one of the major causes of the fire, will continue and will increase the risk of another devastating fire.

The most visible sign of economic distress is the cost of housing. Between 2000-2015 inflation-adjusted median rents increased by 17 percent while median renter annual income declined by 9 percent. Before the fire, housing was unaffordable for 55 percent of Santa Rosa renters because they paid more than 30 percent of their gross monthly income for rent. The fires exacerbated the crisis by destroying 5 percent of the city's housing and triggering a 36 percent increase of rents by unscrupulous landlords.

A just recovery must include public policy to raise the wage floor, make housing more affordable, and create good living wage jobs.

Moreover, the increasing threat of wildfires and the lengthening of the wildfire season due to climate change have accompanied growing economic insecurity. Cycles of drier and hotter weather followed by extreme rainfall and then rampant growth of combustible vegetation, coupled with suburban sprawl in high fire-prone areas like Fountaingrove, have increased the risk of wildfires.

A just recovery must limit sprawl, protect urban growth boundaries and community separators, and require higher building standards to minimize fire risk.

The Alliance for a Just Recovery (AJR) was formed by labor, environmental, faith, and community based organizations to provide a voice for those who have the least resources to recover and to advocate for public policy to address structural inequality, the climate crisis, and the wildfire threat.

On Thursday, July 19th the AJR will sponsor a forum at 6 pm at Christ Church United Methodist 1717 Yulupa Ave. in Santa Rosa. Presenters will discuss our common agenda for a just recovery that includes rent control, \$15 citywide minimum wage, raising the real estate transfer tax to fund affordable housing, and 'zero net energy' and 'all-electric ready' housing policy to decrease fire risk and our reliance on fossil fuel.

More info: <http://www.northbayjobswithjustice>.

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