



News Release

Sandbranch Says “No” to Involuntary Move Plan

Residents Face Forcible Removal

June 7, 2016

June 7, 2016 DALLAS, Texas - Following a meeting of Dallas County Commissioners at which Commissioner John Wiley Price instructed Dallas County staff to design a plan to remove all residents from Sandbranch and demolish their homes, resident representatives reacted in disbelief vowing to resist. Pastor Eugene Keahey, speaking on behalf of residents and the Sandbranch Development and Water Supply Corporation (SDWSC) said the community’s own plan, not eviction, is the best solution for bringing a water distribution system and other humanitarian services to Sandbranch residents.

Under Commissioner Price’s plan, first residents would be offered money to voluntarily move and have their homes demolished. When Dallas County offered a similar program in 2005, the county arranged for the demolition and paid the vendors directly. Homeowners who accepted that plan received an average of \$350 as a buyout payment.

Residents who refuse the voluntary buyout would be involuntarily removed. Dallas County, under the auspices of the Health Code, would conduct inspections of each residence then declare the house a public nuisance and fine the homeowner between \$50.00 and \$200.00 per day. Dallas County would then get a court order to demolish the house and sue the property owner to recover the cost of demolition.

Keahey, responding to the options said, “Dallas County’s buyout in 2005 was a disaster for the community, now, this is even worse. Who wants the government coming into their home, announcing it’s unfit, then kicking you out? Some of these residents are well into their senior years and have lived their entire lives in Sandbranch. A move would all but kill them. All we want from the county is to stop illegal dumping in this area, spray for mosquitos, and keep our roads repaired.”

Mark McPherson, an attorney representing the SDWSC balked at the plan, as well, describing it as a Dallas County housing grab. McPherson said, “Imagine you are a resident of Sandbranch. You make \$720 per month but you own your home and you know your neighbors. One day, an official shows up at your door and says, ‘I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you out of these deplorable living conditions’. How many people in North Dallas or the suburbs would go for that deal?”

Keahey emphasized, “Sandbranch has its own ideas for helping residents in its *Strategic Vision and Plan for Improvements to the Sandbranch Community* that began in March 2016 with incorporation of the SDWSC. The SDWSC board already has identified a major engineering firm to explore ways to bring water to the community. The solution can be funded up to 75% by grants from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), with the remaining 25% coming from other grants and funding sources, i.e., costing Dallas County little or nothing.”

Keahey said, “The community’s approach is a new way of looking at solving challenging problems like this. Don’t leave it entirely to local government, sure they have a role to play, but look for collaborative partnerships, non-profits, and new funding sources then apply them creatively. It’s disappointing today’s action at the Commissioners’ Court didn’t even acknowledge we have a plan to provide water as well as home repair and maintenance, nutrition, and health services. It looks like the only plan they advanced was forcible eviction of innocent residents.”

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About Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, through the non-profit organization Project Dream Haus, serves as the Sandbranch Community’s primary source of social services and water distribution. This historic church, one of the oldest African-American churches in North Texas, was established in 1878 by 12 freed slaves under the leadership of Rev. Allen Hawthorne. In 1910, three Kleberg residents donated a plot of land to establish a Negro cemetery in the southeastern section of Dallas County near the church. At least two of the founding families of Mt. Zion Baptist Church have loved ones buried in the Sandbranch Cemetery. Originally, the church was located near what is now Simonds Road; however, in the late 1930s, church members, after working their day jobs and using their own skills, constructed its current building on Burns Drive. From its beginnings, the church has been active in the community by supporting voter registration drives, trash clean up efforts, and medical screenings. Pastor Eugene B. Keahey was named the church’s pastor in 2013.

About [Project DreamHaus](#)

Project DreamHaus, formerly E. B. Keahey Ministries, was founded in 2001 by Eugene and Deanna Keahey with a mission *to help the underserved become self sufficient through education, economic awareness, and strong community development*. The ministry provides food, clothing, and support to those in need through the Bert Roy Mobile Food Pantry, Deanna’s Clothes Closet, and *Sandbranch...everybody’s community!* As it offers these services, Project DreamHaus demonstrates its motto, “Changing Lives One Dream at a Time!”

About [Sandbranch...everybody’s community!](#)

Sandbranch...everybody’s community! is a grassroots effort organized by Project DreamHaus to bring water, sewage, and social services to Sandbranch, TX., an unincorporated community in the southeastern corner of Dallas County. Just 14 miles from one of the richest cities in America, Sandbranch is the poorest community in Dallas County. It has been without running water for over 30 years. *Sandbranch...everybody’s community!* is guided by an unpaid advisory committee made up of business, education, legal, and public relations professionals who believe giving a basic human right ---clean, drinkable water---to the citizens of Sandbranch is imperative. This team created the [Strategic Vision and Plan for Improvements to the Sandbranch Community](#) to address the water and sewer as well as humanitarian and social services needs in Sandbranch.