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We, in PIA, are so glad you are all here: Here on the grounds of this community, a community that has such a fine history of supporting the work of justice and compassion. Here, where we gather in the cause of democratic dialogue. Being here is such a fine expression of the American spirit . . . for in this place, at this time, we freely gather, we freely gather with the doors opened widely and in welcome to all; we gather to speak truth to one another, to verify our commitment to justice for all people, no matter what their color, economic status, employment or profession, education, or religious faith.

We are so glad you have all come today: Freely exercising your rights as citizens to speak the truth to one another in open community, in public dialogue. We are glad you are here, because we know that it means you care; we know that it means you have given precious time to go beyond the surface facts, the superficial figures of problems confronting our community. We know that your being here means that you have thought deeply about the painful reality of the shortage of affordable housing in this city.

And thinking about this painful reality---and we must think honestly about it if we want to be authentic citizens, if we want to live our deepest values, our faith---we come to a startling, yet very clear and undeniable choice. All across this community, in its homes and businesses, in its educational institutions and in its governing bodies, we are now faced with a choice, a very crucial choice. We are faced with a choice about vision. A vision of what this city is really going to be; what it is going to be ten years from now, 20 years from now, and beyond.

Which is to say, we are faced with a question of values, values that connect the heart and mind: What kind of city do we want? How safe will it be for its citizens? What will the quality of their lives be like? And, who, who will be allowed to live in this city?

Which is to say, we are faced with a choice that affects the very soul of this community. This deepest most vital part of our selves---where our hearts are centered in truth---both our individual soul and the very soul of the community itself are concerned not just with what will make some of us comfortable, in our deepest selves we are concerned with what is good for everyone who chooses to live here.

The soul of the city asks deep questions of us, questions like these:

Are we only concerned with comfort for our citizens, or are we also, and very sincerely, concerned about justice, equity and fairness?

Will we build a strong and functioning community by closing the door against the very people who keep our city running; our homes protected; our children educated; our businesses, hospitals, schools, homes and vehicles clean and functioning?

Do we want a city with a gatekeeper mentality, no matter how subtle, that through the force of economic power drives people away, people who have gifts and talents that we absolutely need?

Will we dare to give our deepest personal values, our religious values a full hearing? And when those values tell us clearly that our priorities must honor authentic human needs and not just a concern for luxuries, will we have the courage to answer honestly?

These are soul questions because they are ethical questions. These are soul questions because they cause a holy disturbance in our hearts. These are soul questions because they challenge us to be fully human. These are the questions we need to answer as we make our choice about the future of this community. Soul questions. Ethical questions. Questions that concern the deepest values that give our lives meaning---not just comfort, not just superficial pleasantness, but authentic, deep and life-affirming meaning.

We need to be practical. We need to look at numbers. Numbers of units, numbers of dollars, numbers of population density. Yes, of course, we do. But underneath all of the debating and wrestling that that looking will bring, we need to be concerned with what makes us most fully human, most deeply grounded in what is sacred in this life.

This is why we gather. This is why we gather here, in a sanctuary of peace and a home of just human relationships.

May you do your work today, and all days, with a fire in your vision for this community's future, with warmth for each other in your hearts, and with truth-inspired clarity in your thinking.

Ashé-Amen-Ameen-Shalom-Blessed Be. Gracias y Namasté.