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High-rise: High stakes for the displaced, too

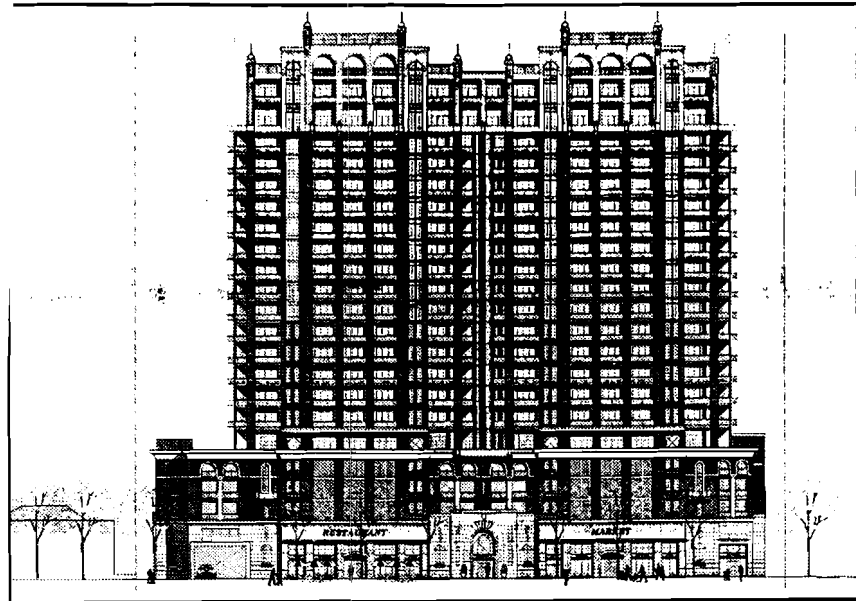
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Maryland Manor resident Douglas Smith has lived in or near West University his entire life.

In 1972 his parents bought a home on Rice Boulevard where they still live just a few blocks from their son's apartment on 1717 Bissonnet St. Smith remembers growing up there and attending Poe Elementary just a few block away.

The Poe cafeteria looked much smaller to him last week when it was filled with angry neighbors who came together to organize support against a planned luxury high-rise than it did when he starred in the school play in the same room.

"I was Captain Hook on that stage," he told the crowd, explaining



Submitted photo by Buckhead Investment Partners

An artist's rendering of the completed project.

HIGH-RISE

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that he had come to join the opposition. Construction of the high-rise would displace Smith and 50 other residents of the Maryland Manor Apartments,

Smith pointed out the area of concrete covering sewer work, which was a mystery to Maryland Manor residents when it took place earlier this summer. It was not until he attended the meeting at Poe that he found out the sewer work was part of larger project.

After hearing rumors for weeks about the high-rise, Smith said Maryland Manor residents finally received official word they would be forced to vacate.

On September 28, Smith found a

note taped to his door from Buckhead Investment Partners. It offered a \$50 discount on his next month's rent and invited residents to the leasing office to discuss move-out options over kolaches and doughnuts.

"Big deal," Smith said. "I don't want their money, I want to stay in my home," he said.

Buckhead partner Kevin Kirton said that all residents of the small complex received the letter and that no one would be left in the cold. He explained that all current lease agreements would be honored and that residents would be given the option to stay in their residence on a month-to-month basis after their leases expire. He said the firm might even consider offering discounted rates in their luxury build-

ing.

"It would have to be a pretty deep discount," Smith said.

He currently pays about \$900 a month for his one bedroom apartment, which he said is safe and cozy, if not exactly luxurious.

"No way I would live there (in the high-rise) on principal alone," Smith said. "That building does not belong in this neighborhood."

While other neighbors of Southampton and Boulevard Oaks decry the traffic and aesthetic impacts of the planned development, Smith and other Maryland Manor residents will be looking for somewhere else to live.

Smith said he will not likely find another small, affordable abode to rent like the one he calls home now. He will either have to purchase a

home in another neighborhood or move into a large megaplex closer to the Medical Center. But, Smith said he does not regret losing the apartment, as much as he will saying goodbye to the lifestyle.

"I love this area. I ride my bike to work, to the grocery store, visit my friends. Where else in Houston can you do that without a car," he said.

A far cry from the scrappy kid who embraced the role of Hook, the bullying swashbuckler, these days Smith says he knows when he's been beat.

"The little guy never wins these things, you know that right? We are as good as gone," Smith said while reflecting on his impending move. "You can't fight the man," he said.