

## *The Guardians: Reshaping History Project and Exhibition*

### Interview with Cherring Spence, 2021, Part 2

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

What would you say, if you could address or change your top two to three things in this city, what would it be? What do you think would improve the city overall?

Cherring Spence ([00:13](#)):

Oh my goodness.

I think the first thing I would try to change would be all these abandoned houses and these vacant lots, I'd fill them up. Of course, we'd have to build them up, restore them and build, bring in new families. One of the concerns I had with the 21st century schools, and I'm all for new schools, I am all for them. But one of the questions I kept asking during the time that I used to go to the meetings was, "Where are these new students are coming from, how are you going to fill these schools up?" Because, I don't see any development happening. I don't see new homes coming up. I'm for the new school, but I think while you're you doing the 21st century schools, you also need to be built in some 21st century homes. There's some renovations that need to be going on.

And then my concern was, you have the kids. You see what these children are going to have to walk through to get to the 21st century schools? Do you see what they come through every day? Do you see the trash? Do you see the folk that are out on the streets selling drugs? Do you see that they have to come through all of this poverty, all of these high weeds that they have to come through, this grass, they have to come through the glass. They have to come through the broken sidewalks. They have to come through the vacant buildings, the empty buildings that are literally falling down. In some areas, they can't even walk on the sidewalk. They got to walk... I start getting emotional when I talk about that [crosstalk 00:02:32] that breaks my heart. You got to come through all this mess and I don't know any other word to use, but mess. They got to come through all of this mess to get to a brand new building, school building.

That makes no sense to me. If you're building a new school, start putting new homes in here. And if I could do anything, that's what I would do. Years ago they used to have the Dollar program. I don't know what program they need to come up. Either, come back with the Dollar program or come back with a \$2 program. Something that allow people to be able to come into these buildings and rehab them, or build up where there are no buildings. So if you've torn them down, then build them back up. Don't let them sit for 10, 15, 20, 30 years.

And then we look around and we see what we see. I feel like there's no excuse for what we see happening and what we see going on in our city and in our communities, and in Park Heights. I don't understand, how it could have been allowed to get to the place where it's at and it's not just Park Heights. I ride down other streets and I see the same thing happening. Baltimore is so much better than this. It is so much better than this. And again, I don't have all the answers, but I believe, as I've said even with BACT, I believe that Baltimore has the people that do have the answers.

I believe that with a lot of these vacant homes, if people have moved out of the city or people have died, God forbid, but if people have died and they've left their home, and that home has sat vacant for five years, the city ought to develop a policy or procedure or regulation, where in that home you put out postings and you put out information and nobody does anything. And that house has sat vacant.

Nobody has taken care of that property for X number of years. I'm saving five, it should never go beyond five. That's my own opinion, okay. That's my own opinion. That property has sat for five years. That property ought to become part of the community or the city that it is located in. That somebody ought to be able to come and say, "Well look, this property at such and such an address on XYZ street, it has sat vacant for five years, I want it."

Speaker 1 ([06:11](#)):

Right, I want to buy it. [crosstalk 00:06:16] For \$2.

Cherring Spence ([06:15](#)):

I want to rehab it.

Speaker 1 ([06:17](#)):

Because otherwise it's just sitting there and I'm bringing either my own money or applying for grants [Inaudible 00:06:22]

Cherring Spence ([06:22](#)):

Or something to be able to restore that house, to be able to lay claim to it, to go in and build it up. Or the city ought to be able to lay claim to it and go in and say, "Well we have homeless people. We have people that don't have. We have single mothers." However, that that property is not allowed to sit there for 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 years. And people say they can't go into it because it's owned by... And I'm not talking about taking property from people that live there and are struggling and trying to take care of it. That is not what I'm talking about.

Speaker 1 ([07:15](#)):

I understand.

Cherring Spence ([07:19](#)):

But if that property has been sitting there for five years, vacant-

Speaker 1 ([07:24](#)):

You've contacted all the potential family.

Cherring Spence ([07:27](#)):

Exactly. No, no. That's my thing. That would go a long way from all of these vacant properties and-

Speaker 1 ([07:42](#)):

Right and if you're going to tear them all down, cause it's really in bad shape, then you can't just leave an empty lot where you never... The city never takes care of the [inaudible 00:07:54] or someone has to be the keeper of that space and get proper funding to do that.

Cherring Spence ([08:02](#)):

To be able to do it. We went through a walk-through a few years back and with the city, with different people from different agencies of the city. And we were pointing out problem areas and vacant homes

and all that was sitting there. Lots that were grass, had grown so high in one of the individuals that was with us in a walk and I won't share their name. But they said to me well, "The city is not in the business of real estate and all, in terms of [inaudible 00:08:45] that kind of thing." I said, "We know that, but evidently the city don't know that." Cause you're taking people's homes because they can't pay taxes or they're back up on a water bill or they're back up on this. And I know some changes have been made regarding that program, I believe, about that problem. But I said it's ridiculous. I said, "If you have a senior citizen, you have a person and you see that they haven't been able to pay their water bill, what gives you the right to come take their home?"

Speaker 1 ([09:28](#)):

Right and then leave it sitting there empty. [inaudible 00:09:29]

Cherring Spence ([09:28](#)):

And then because they can't pay it, then they are out. And their home has been sold to somebody.

Speaker 1 ([09:38](#)):

Do you know people [inaudible 00:09:41] that have experience-

Cherring Spence ([09:41](#)):

This has happened. This has been an issue in Baltimore city.

Speaker 1 ([09:49](#)):

Yeah.

Cherring Spence ([09:52](#)):

You got a few [inaudible 00:09:53] who do that. But for the most part, if they could've it, they would've paid. So opposed to taking their home, they're allowing somebody else to come and pay it because of back taxes or get all this other money. Then help them to work out a plan to be able to pay it so that they can stay in their home.

Speaker 1 ([10:29](#)):

It's important. You're right. No one wants to live in a neighborhood or community where every other house is falling apart [crosstalk 00:10:40] and you have to walk by things every day it's depressing, right? Over time, you feel like there's a lack of investment from the city or a lack of power to make change and the kids see it on their walk to school. And then think of what goes through their mind every day.

Cherring Spence ([11:01](#)):

Exactly, exactly. And this is terrible. In just this block alone, there are four vacant houses, just this block. I'm sorry, five, just this block. And year after year, those houses have gotten worse, worse, worse, and worse. And every month, not every month, I'm sorry. It's not every month, but every so often we have to call and say, we need somebody to come out and mow the grass. We need somebody, this house has fallen down and dah, dah, dah. And they said, "Well, we're going to cite the owner. We're going to cite the owner. We can't go in on private property and take care of it. So we've can site the owner and that's it." When you've been citing this person for five years now, if they haven't come out by now and done anything with this property, they have no intention of coming out.

But in the meantime, the community, the neighborhood still has to deal with that issue. Still has to deal with that empty house, that vacant lot, or with that grass. I've got a neighbor that lives down the street, a resident, and he will call me every so often, "Ms. Spence, Ms. Spence, I hate to call you again Ms. Spence, but look, can you do anything about the property next door to me? Because I can't even go sit out on my porch because the mosquitoes... because the grass is so high."

"That those mosquitoes and they got some of everything. And Ms. Spence, you know keep my lot clean. I keep, I mow my grass, but Ms. Spence, I done got so old now, I used to mow it, but I can't take care of it anymore. I can't cut that grass over there anymore. And nobody was paying me and I know it wasn't my property, but Cherring Spence it's right next door to me. And I just can't take care of it anymore." And this is an elderly person now, [crosstalk 00:13:30] And it's been that long. They said, "But I can't take care of it Ms. Spence. Ms. Spence, can you please call somebody and see if they can come and get that grass cut down over there?"

Speaker 1 ([13:43](#)):

Okay. Any last things or thoughts. You've said a lot. I just didn't know, I want to...

Cherring Spence ([13:50](#)):

Well, I do want to add that along with being President of Neighborhood Association and all, that I am a minister and I know that from our conversations that we have talked about that. But I thank God for the strength that He gives me and the help that He has given me to do the work that I do. And that is also a part of ministry that gets out, in caring for and looking after and interceding and advocating for. That's all a part of that too.

Speaker 1 ([14:37](#)):

Thank you Ms. Spence