

Church Property Re-Development and Impact to Nonprofits and Social Services in the U District

Background Information

A number of factors that have converged over the last ten years are driving the dramatic changes occurring in the University District today. In 2012, Sound Transit finalized the “Northgate extension” to the Link light rail. This final project added a new station at the corner of NE 43rd St and Brooklyn Ave. In February, 2017, the Seattle City Council and Mayor Ed Murray approved legislation allowing for greater height and density in the core of the U District neighborhood. Finally, at the end of 2018, the University of Washington Master Plan was approved by the City Council. The Master Plan demonstrates how the university will serve an additional 7,000 students annually through increased development on the west and south areas of the campus.

Due to these factors, property values and development opportunities in the U District have risen and a number of high-rise projects are already underway. The increase in property values has prompted many churches and congregations with long histories in the U District to evaluate their sustainability in the area. Many faith organizations have experienced immense challenges in maintaining their current facilities, with skyrocketing costs, contemporary building codes, and diminishing congregations. The faith community has been a pillar of support for social service organizations through access to facilities, volunteers for programs, and advocacy for vulnerable populations. Our community is stronger because these faith-based organizations create community where people needing assistance can be connected with people willing to assist.

The Urban Vitality Committee through the U District Partnership wanted to better understand the changing landscape of church properties in our community. More specifically, we wanted to assess the impact on social services and nonprofit organizations that may be displaced if church property is

diminished. Currently, many church facilities in the area lease their vast spaces to other organizations at below-market rates. In addition, many faith-based organizations provide much needed services to vulnerable populations currently residing in or accessing the U District.

Scope of Work

In December, 2018, our task force started with three main goals for this work:

- 1) Create a spreadsheet of church/faith-based properties and entities in the U District.
- 2) Survey these organizations to learn their current services, redevelopment (if any) plans, and number of participants utilizing social services.
- 3) Create a report on the potential impact of displacement on nonprofits and social services in the U District.

Our intent is to gather information and raise awareness about this issue. We understand that many other neighborhoods may be experiencing similar issues throughout Seattle. Using the information we gather, we'll create some next steps and calls for action that can ensure programs and services vital to healthy communities can remain where they are needed the most.

Summary of Findings

The initial survey was sent to 28 faith-based organizations electronically and through the mail in late May of 2019. Task force members then made follow-up phone calls and personal visits over the next two weeks to improve survey response rates. In total, we received 14 responses to our survey (50% response rate). Because of their development potential, we focused our follow-up conversations on the

largest land-owning organizations and were pleased that we received responses from the eight largest properties in the U District.

As mentioned above, churches provide space and volunteers to a broad array of social services for vulnerable populations. Some of these services are unique to one or two facilities. Every time a church closes for redevelopment, all of those services are put at risk. We found that there are certain sectors of service provision that are being heavily impacted and below are some of the highlights and stats from the survey responses.

- **Services for the Homeless Population: More than 50% of homelessness service providers are at risk of losing their space due to redevelopment.** Many of the churches in the area provide services for the homeless population. As we know, many young people experiencing homelessness gravitate to the U District because it's easier to assimilate into the population due to the high number of students. **Eleven organizations** provide either homeless services directly or provide space for other organizations. In overnight shelters housed in these churches, **approximately 100 people are provided safe locations.** Several other churches/non-profits offer services such as counseling, restrooms and shower facilities, needle exchange, job training, and life-skill development. **There is currently no plan to replace the services being displaced by church redevelopment.**
- **Food Access/Stability: More than 100 people each day rely on access to nutritious meals through organizations in danger of losing their space.** In conjunction with homeless services, many churches also provide some form of food access to members of the community. These programs range from daily hot meals to a Sunday "outreach cart" that brings non-perishables to

people living on the street.

- **Child Care Needs: Three preschool centers (~110 spaces) operating in local churches will be displaced within a five-year time frame.** Across Seattle, the need for affordable child care continues to grow. Quality early childhood education lays a foundation for children's success in school and in life by helping to develop critically thoughtful, compassionate adults. The proximity to the University of Washington increases the need for child care amongst UW students, faculty and staff. High market-rate rentals will drive child development centers out of the U District when churches redevelop or relocate.
- **Square Footage Impact: In total, the U District could lose over 30,000 square feet of space dedicated to services or nonprofits that reside within faith-based organizations.** This figure represents self-reported information provided by the respondents, so the measured number may be higher. **Approximately 75% of this square footage** is either already slated for redevelopment or being considered for redevelopment in the next five years. All tenants on church property enjoy below-market rent for their assigned spaces. Four organizations stated that market rates and/or rent may influence their decision to remain in the U District. While we did not survey the social service organizations or nonprofits paying the rent, several comments were made indicating that services would be disrupted or relocated due to the increase in rental fees. The market rate on this square footage could cost a nonprofit between \$100,000-\$500,000 annually.
- **Volunteer Service Opportunities: Over 700 unique volunteer opportunities will vanish if churches and tenant organizations are displaced.** All churches, nonprofits, and social service

providers rely on the generosity and support from volunteers. From board members to direct service providers, volunteers are the critical support needed to put programs into action. Many of these volunteers and service-learning interns come from the University of Washington. Our next generation of leaders will lose their opportunity to give back to their local community with disruption or relocation of services.

- **Desire to Remain in U District:** Many churches who completed the survey own their current property (see addendum). However, there were three owners who were not able to disclose at the time of the survey their intent to redevelop. While this could mean a number of things, it is concerning to consider the impact of losing three more properties to redevelopment. Of the churches that responded in this manner, none of them declared their intent to remain in the U District. However, all the other respondents declared their intent to maintain their presence in the U District and continue to provide services to vulnerable populations.

Call to Action

Based on the information presented above, our task force is calling for the following action items to address the impending loss of nonprofit and social service space in the U District. The first three action items will be completed by this task force as its final scope of work. Additional work will require the formation of a new group of interested community partners.

Current Task Force Scope of Work

- Report back to churches, faith-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and social service providers who participated in the survey with these results. Recruit sponsors and/or advocates to help with communication plan.

- Communicate results from this preliminary task force to elected officials, agencies and other stakeholders, including but not limited to: University of Washington, Seattle HSD, Seattle Housing Authority, Sound Transit, current and future Seattle City District Four Councilmember and staff, county and state representatives for the area, local businesses, and local service providers.
- Identify potential core group to invite to form next phase task force.

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The New Community-Based Task Force – Next Phase Scope of Work

- Convene core group and establish a broader, more representative task force membership.
- Consider and pursue immediate strategies to provide relief or support for populations that will lose services.
- Complete a comprehensive needs assessment by Q4 of 2019 to determine critical and unique social services that are provided throughout the U District. This needs assessment would provide a review of current services aligned with access to these services by vulnerable populations and the stability of their facility-related support.
- Share results with other neighborhood groups who may experience similar loss of service in their local communities.

Final Comments

Overall, our committee was pleased with the number of respondents to our survey, especially given the high number of property owners who engaged in the survey responses. We have already seen the impact of church relocation on our community. In 2018, the University Christian Church sold their property for redevelopment, leading to tenant displacement. Services provided by these tenants included early childcare education, overnight shelter, behavioral health counseling, and food distribution. The sale of University Christian Church also displaced a number of nonprofit organizations' administrative offices operating out of this space (approximately 12). This redevelopment project served as a wake-up call to our U District community. We need to better understand the impact such development would have on our social services infrastructure.

In the course of completing this survey, we learned about the tangible effect displacement could have on the University District. Loss of space for services like the Urban Rest Stop and Needle Exchange

Program will place extra burdens on businesses and residents in the U District. The loss of the Urban Rest Stop means 85 toilet uses and 60–90 showers PER DAY will be eliminated. With the arrival of the Link light rail in 2021, the need for these basic public services will only increase.

In order for the U District to remain -vibrant, successful, and relevant, we must maintain **comprehensive** services within our area. As one respondent noted in our survey, “If people depending on public transportation also need services from more than one agency, the impact of relocating even one can be HUGE in terms of increased travel time, more barriers, and less access to services.” Our proximity to the University of Washington makes the U District an appealing location for young people experiencing homelessness. This proximity also provides numerous volunteer opportunities and hands-on service learning for the student population. With the information in this report, we have an opportunity to advocate and persuade public and private entities to make a difference for our community in the next five years. Through better understanding of the issues and opportunities presented in this report, we hope the community can band together to find innovative, transformative, and impactful ways to serve our most vulnerable inhabitants.