



A new model for neighborhood empowerment

In 2014 Yesler Community Collaborative (YCC) formed to support the redevelopment of Yesler Terrace and the health of the historic and culturally sensitive neighborhoods nearby. In this report we outline the events and actions of the last five years, highlighting best practices and lessons learned.

Serious issues of gentrification and displacement have impacted our neighborhoods for decades, and worsened during this time. These pressures threatened the character and livability of Capitol Hill, the Central Area, First Hill and the Chinatown-International District, including Little Saigon. This led YCC toward work on anti-displacement policies and equitable and sustainable community development initiatives. Our partners coalesced around these issues and successfully advocated for change with a unified voice.

As you page through this report, you'll learn more about these issues, and about the committed people (some of whom are pictured above) who joined us to forge new ways of working together. As we transition from YCC to Crescent Collaborative, we look forward to seeing this work become an established way of citizen involvement in Seattle and beyond.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to our funders, our partners and the Seattle City government leaders who have helped our collaboration to succeed.

Sue Taoka,
Board President



In 2014, Seattle Housing Authority's multi-year redevelopment of Yesler Terrace, Seattle's oldest low-income neighborhood, was well underway. Instead of an enclave of poverty, the new Yesler Terrace would become a vibrant mixed-income community where all residents could thrive.

The Seattle Foundation convened local philanthropic organizations to find ways to support the ambitious educational, environmental and social equity goals of the redevelopment and extend its positive impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods.

The result was the formation of Yesler Community Collaborative, a nonprofit backbone organization. In this role, YCC would guide vision and strategy,

lend technical and administrative support, and help the community advance policy initiatives. Seattle Foundation, JPMorgan Chase, Bullitt Foundation and the Boeing Company provided initial funding for the new organization.

With Doris Koo as lead strategist and Ellen Kissman contributing policy skills, the team engaged with neighborhood organizations around Yesler Terrace to build trust and seek common values and vision. Virginia Felton later joined as communications strategist, developing and maintaining communications tools including a website and social media presence.

Early on, YCC brought together knowledgeable community leaders and technical experts in issue-area cohorts (working groups). These groups identified concerns and goals common

to all the neighborhoods around issues of housing, environment and economic opportunity.

All the cohorts saw gentrification as the primary threat to their neighborhoods' unique cultural heritages. They agreed that a comprehensive anti-displacement strategy was the best response. As they coalesced around the theme of anti-displacement, the cohorts evolved into an over-arching, interdisciplinary policy cohort that best captured the connections across complex issues and enabled effective policy responses.

In addition, YCC convened larger partner meetings three times a year. The partner meetings brought interested people from the philanthropic sector and government together with community partners engaged in the day-to-day anti-



In 2014 there was lack of coordination among different organizations, and in particular, a lack of coordination and building of collective power among multiple housing and community development organizations within the neighborhood. Enter YCC at that time. It was a terrific match.

—Kent Koth, Executive Director, Seattle University Center for Community Engagement

displacement work – an unusual cross-sector approach. Partner meetings gave all the participants the opportunity to keep up to date on the Yesler Terrace redevelopment and Seattle University Youth Initiative, learn about the cohorts' policy work and local pilot projects, and explore priority issues together.

Early successes fueled the power of collaboration



Central Area Collaborative

With encouragement and technical assistance from YCC, business owners and community activists from the Central Area formed a community collaborative based on YCC's model. YCC helped CAC obtain a \$102,000 grant from the City of Seattle's Office of Economic Development that enabled the collaborative to begin aligning ongoing commercial development in the Central Area with community input, and establishing, retaining and growing independent, micro- and small businesses.

Eco-District Model

Capitol Hill Housing led early efforts to expand the Eco-District concept to adjacent neighborhoods. YCC recognized this model as a way to evaluate what each neighborhood needed to be greener and more equitable.

HALA Recommendations

In early 2015 the City of Seattle issued recommendations that became known as HALA—the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda. YCC partners analyzed these recommendations and, acting together, were able to advocate successfully for several policy strategies concerning housing preservation, innovative financing, maximizing the use of available city land and providing incentives to owners to maintain affordable rents.

BUILD Health Challenge

With grant-writing and organizational support from YCC, InterIm CDA received a \$75,000 BUILD Health planning grant. The resulting Healthy Community Action Plan identified key areas of focus to improve the health of people living in the Chinatown/International District. The Action Plan identified issues and disparities

within the neighborhood. The effort was awarded a subsequent implementation grant from BUILD Health with a matching grant from Swedish Hospital.



There was a feeling of enormous displacement pressure and risk that was palpable at that time, and there was no clear policy solution being articulated. Having YCC active at that point and bringing people together to hash out the types of stances, policy and advocacy we should be doing collectively was much needed.

—Tiernan Martin,
Livable Communities Manager,
Futurewise

Core Partners

Seattle Housing Authority and Seattle University emerged as Core Partners within the collaborative. The housing authority set a high standard for sustainable and equitable development at Yesler Terrace and worked closely with Seattle University to improve education outcomes at neighborhood schools, including Bailey Gatzert Elementary, Washington Middle School and Garfield High School. SU's Center for Community Engagement connected university faculty and students with the schools for tutoring and after-school involvement. Grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, among others, supported these efforts.



Since 2015 Yesler Community Collaborative has created a strong community voice for equity in Seattle City government policymaking. Seattle was in the midst of an economic boom, resulting in rapidly rising rents for housing and commercial space. City government, under pressure from the community, had begun to tackle gentrification with task forces and policy proposals.



Yesler Collaborative partners and consultants seized the moment, identifying from among many proposals those that were most relevant to our neighborhoods' needs, then worked to see them through to adoption and implementation. The combination of the consultant team's policy expertise, the partners' immersion in community needs and vision, and the unified

position of several adjacent neighborhoods proved especially effective. Partners noted that YCC's ability to scan the political and policy environment, and work strategically on well-timed and well-placed advocacy, armed with solid policy proposals, was something that would not have been possible for them to do themselves.

Development opportunity versus displacement risk

As part of its Comprehensive Plan process, the City developed an equity grid which compared neighborhoods in terms of resident access to opportunity for economic development and the risk of displacement. All YCC's neighborhoods were designated as areas of great opportunity and significant risk.

YCC coordinated comments on the plan, using the City's stated commitment to race and social equity and long-term environmental sustainability to make the case for YCC's policy proposals. Consultants and YCC partners

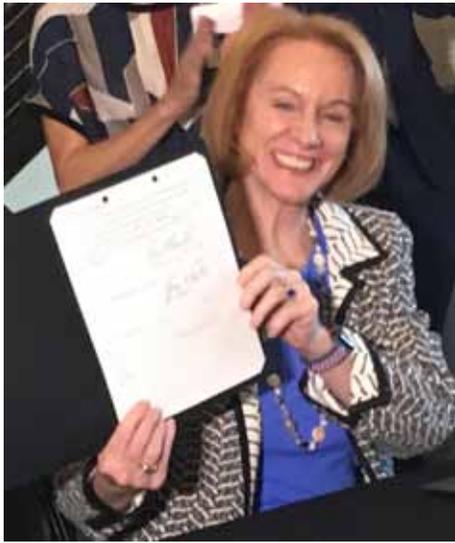
followed up with research and policy development to identify ways to slow displacement, advance equity and support diversity.

As they participated in policy development, YCC partners engaged in the advocacy process with a singular voice. For example, partners spoke with individual City Council members as a group, representing their neighborhoods, rather than as representatives of individual community development organizations. This increased their impact and influence.

Your comments and advocacy positions were so firmly rooted in what the City was trying to accomplish that it was not always easy, but it was easier to get what you wanted done because of that foundation and that cooperative approach.

—Amy Gore, Seattle City Council Central Staff





Mandatory Housing Affordability and Community Preference Policies

In order to address issues of displacement and affordability, the City initiated zoning changes and new regulations that would connect construction of affordable housing to new, denser development. Working with our partners, YCC presented convincing arguments for YCC neighborhoods to generate more affordable housing than other neighborhoods as building heights and density increased. In addition, City Council adopted companion legislation to specifically call for actions to preserve the cultural and historic character of these communities, and to enhance commercial affordability for local small businesses.

YCC also advocated for City planners to examine ways to allow housing developers to give priority access to a portion of housing units to people who work in the neighborhood, or who formerly lived in a neighborhood that has experienced high displacement. In February 2019, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan signed an executive order aimed at preventing displacement and including these community preference policies. Community preference was officially incorporated into Office of Housing funding policies with passage of legislation by City Council in June 2019.

A City for the Many

In mid-2016, YCC partnered with Weber Shandwick, a global integrated marketing firm, to find ways to define and articulate the concept of equitable development. Weber Shandwick contributed more than \$100,000 in staff time to conduct research and test messaging that would forward YCC’s goals and help policy makers and the general public better understand the implications for Seattle of rapid development



and gentrification. The firm suggested the phrase “Own our growth” and produced a short video, *A City for the Many*, available on our website. It articulates these concepts in the words of ordinary people threatened by change. Since completion of the video and the use of consistent messages, we have seen these concepts and phrases echoed in the work of community organizations and city leaders.

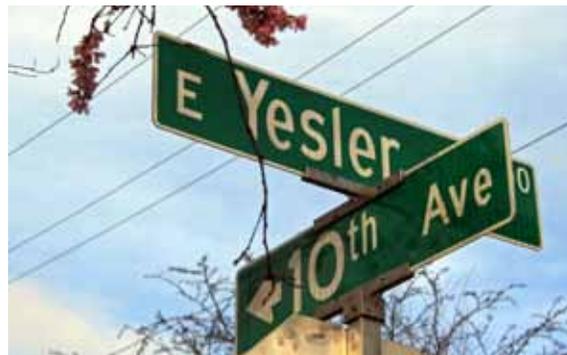
YCC tours City directors

Rather than simply describing the issues around equitable development, YCC partners hosted City department directors for a tour of YCC neighborhoods in late 2016. They highlighted parcels of land in public ownership and led discussion of the properties’ best use to meet emerging needs as the city’s population increases. In the Central Area and Little Saigon, the tour group looked at new developments that both threatened neighborhood character and offered unique opportunities for equitable development. At the end of the tour city directors shared that they found it valuable to see conditions on the ground through the eyes of community leaders, meet those leaders face to face and learn directly from them about the issues and opportunities within their neighborhoods.



You used your advocacy to not only initiate policy campaigns but also to bring them across the finish line, and you were the ones pushing at the start, and maybe even pulling at the end. And that continuity is really challenging to find in advocacy organizations, but particularly in coalitions.

—Emily Alvarado, Director,
Seattle Office of Housing



NEW PROJECTS REFLECT THE VALUES AND VISION OF EMERGING PARTNERSHIPS



As nonprofit community development organizations sat together at the same table, new possibilities for partnerships emerged. One of the first redevelopment projects to reflect such innovation was the new Liberty Bank Building at 24th and Union. Behind this redevelopment is a group of nonprofit partners that hold the interests of the community at heart. They include Capitol Hill Housing, Africatown, Byrd Barr Place and the Black Community Impact Alliance.

Liberty Bank originally opened in 1968 at 24th and Union as the first Black-owned bank in the Pacific Northwest, founded as a community response to redlining and disinvestment in Central Seattle. It operated for 20 years and was eventually bought by Key Bank. In 2015 Key Bank offered to sell the property to Capitol Hill Housing for affordable housing.

Partners in the Liberty Bank project established bold community benefit goals at the outset of the development process, including culturally relevant design, commitment to W/MBE contractors, and maximizing benefits for long-time residents and local small, black-owned businesses.

As the 155 affordable housing units were completed, Liberty Bank partners actively reached out to and recruited current and former residents of the Central Area. As a result, 87 percent of the units were leased by people of color. In addition, three black-owned businesses have signed leases to occupy the street-level commercial space. These include Cafe Avole, That Brown Girl Cooks and Earl's Cuts and Styles barbershop, which has been an anchor of neighborhood culture for many years.

The barbershop's former location nearby, at 23rd and Union, is now the site of a new 2.5 acre development where Lake Union Partners is building 443 housing units. The soon-to-be built Africatown Plaza at Midtown will also be part of this block. The block was long considered an anchor of the African American community in the region; activists had feared that its redevelopment would erase its proud history.

YCC served as a facilitator in negotiations, bringing Africatown Community Land Trust and Capitol Hill Housing together with Forterra and developer Lake Union Partners to forge a partnership. Africatown and Capitol Hill Housing will co-own Africatown Plaza, providing community and affordable retail space, and 130 units of permanent affordable housing.



Part of the goal was to create a collaboration and that happened in part because YCC said, "We're going to try a lot of things, a bunch of them aren't going to work, and we're going to coalesce around the ones that do."

—Bill Block, former HUD Region X Administrator, long-time board chair of Seattle Housing Authority, and current YCC board member



Pilot projects created jobs for neighborhood residents

YCC was involved in several pilot projects and provided small grants to train and support neighborhood residents as they sought career advancement. An early pilot taught sewing skills to Yesler Terrace residents so that they could work in clothing manufacturing or tailoring.

A job shadowing pilot at Harborview Hospital, Keiro NW, Seattle University and other local employers provided ESL training and work experience for residents in health services. Small stipends helped participants to stick with the program through to the end. This pilot demonstrated that participants were more successful and satisfied with the program when they stayed together in class and could support each other.



Revitalization at Yesler Terrace

Since 2014, the landscape of Yesler Terrace continued to change, as its worn-out housing was replaced with new apartments, parks and amenities. First Kebero Court, then Raven Terrace, then Hoa Mai Gardens came online, adding more than 200 new low-income apartments and bringing Yesler Terrace residents back to their neighborhood. Market rate apartments were also built during this time. A new pedestrian hillclimb connected the Yesler neighborhood with the International District and a panoramic park was built next to the Community Center in the heart of the neighborhood.

Economic Development

Through its Center for Community Engagement, Seattle University has worked closely with YCC to identify ways to place the knowledge and resources of SU staff and students where they can be of service within the community. SU's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship founded a program that brings business expertise to small businesses in the Central Area. The Resource Amplification & Management Program (Ramp-up) offers business coaching and planning, resource connections, and other technical support to local businesses so they may remain, grow and thrive in the neighborhood. In return, SU students receive real world experience and the university creates deeper community connections.



Yesler Family Housing

In early 2019 a three-way joint venture was announced between Seattle Housing Authority, Seattle Chinatown International District PDA and Capitol Hill Housing to develop 158 affordable apartments for working families. The new facility will be built across from Bailey Gatzert Elementary School, at 1215 East Fir Street. The 48,000 square foot site was purchased by the housing authority from King County.

The new facility will also include an 8,000 square-foot childcare/early-learning center and several units that can be licensed for in-home childcare businesses. The portion of the building facing Yesler Way will be dedicated to community-based retail services.

The partnership between SCIDpda and Capitol Hill Housing allowed the two organizations to compete successfully to develop the site, bringing complementary strengths to the development and ongoing management of the project. The development team will continue to work closely with community partners, including Friends of Little Saigon, Seattle University's Center for Community Engagement, Urban League of Greater Seattle, Africatown, Hidmo, 206 Zulu, Historic Seattle, and 12th Avenue Stewards.

Many grants supported the work of YCC and partners

YCC's ability to assist partners with grant writing made it easier for them to participate in collaboration. Since its formation, YCC has helped its partners access nearly \$1.2 million in grants. Through YCC consultant efforts toward advocacy and referrals, partner organizations received an additional \$2.26 million in grants. YCC operations (including pass-through grants to other organization) was supported by more than \$1.5 million in grant funding from its fiscal sponsors.



I expect that YCC will continue to evolve, and that the evolution will, hopefully, be based upon the evolution of the communities that are there and the needs that are presented.

—Rachael Steward, Administrator,
Community Services Division,
Seattle Housing Authority

Lessons learned, looking ahead

As community organizations sat at the same table, leaders were willing to try new ways of working together. Among lessons learned over this time were:

- Building and sustaining trust among partners takes time and investment of energy, but it is the foundation of successful collaboration.
- The convening of shared spaces for discussion and exploration, supported by consultant expertise and capacity, gave small nonprofits the opportunity to connect their day-to-day work with a broader, more long-term vision.
- There is power in adjacent neighborhoods facing similar issues coming together and speaking with a united voice and consistent messages to decision-makers.

In recognition of its pioneering work for anti-displacement and equitable development, YCC received several awards. In March 2017 Futurewise named Doris Koo and YCC as a “Community Champion.” This was followed in October by Crosscut’s “Courage in Business” award. Later, Seattle Jobs Initiative honored Doris Koo at its annual community celebration.



In addition to creating this report to document its activities, YCC has produced a series of short video built from interviews by people who participated in the collaborative. They provide reflections from the perspectives of the funders and partners themselves. The videos are located in the History section on the new website at www.crescentcollab.org.

Looking to the future

As the date for Yesler Community Collaborative to sunset drew near, several partners began to explore the possibility of continuing the effort. In summer 2019 a plan was developed and agreed upon. The name Yesler Community Collaborative was changed to Crescent Collaborative (www.crescentcollab.org), reflecting the geography of neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown Seattle.

The board of directors was expanded, adding four members who would explicitly represent their neighborhoods: First Hill, Capitol Hill, the Central Area and Chinatown-International District-Little Saigon. The board will assume an expanded role in deciding on policy initiatives, and the partnership will continue to have consultant support.



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Communities of Opportunity
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Neighborcare Health
Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic
Public Health | Seattle & King County
Seattle Colleges
Seattle Chinatown International District PDA
Seattle Foundation
Seattle Goodwill
Seattle Housing Authority
Seattle Jobs Initiative
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YMCA, Meredith Mathews Branch

Consultants

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Brian Chu (2016-2019)

