Reside Vancouver Appendix D
Equity Framework

Contents

Introduction

The systematic creation and implementation of oppressive housing and economic development policies in the U.S. has led to racial and class segregation of neighborhoods, intergenerational wealth disparities between White and non-White populations, and household poverty rates that are disproportionately shared within populations of color in cities throughout the country.

Recent efforts to invest in urban centers throughout the country has led to the gentrification of disinvested neighborhoods and the involuntary displacement of vulnerable communities such as populations with lower educational attainment, renters, and/or communities of color. While Vancouver has historically been classified as a suburb of Portland and the metropolitan region's second largest city, the city is poised to transition to an independent urban area that offers its residents more opportunities to enjoy mixed use neighborhoods, jobs closer to home, multimodal transportation, and redevelopment of parks and infrastructure.

With numerous planning efforts underway like the Heights District Plan and others in the pipeline such as the City's Commercial Corridors Strategy - there could be significant impacts on existing residents. Of particular concern is increasing housing costs as the neighborhoods become more desirable and demand for housing in the area increases. However, we recognize the importance of - and benefits related to - taking on public improvement projects to improve schools, parks, infrastructure, and access to commercial and housing opportunities. If these projects are properly managed through strategic policy and programmatic efforts, the negative impacts associated with public investments may be mitigated - allowing current and future residents to enjoy the improvements regardless of race and/or economic class.

Therefore, the foundation of an anti-displacement strategy must be rooted in anti-racist, anti-oppression disciplines. Doing so will allow the City to account for historic injustices, help mitigate any negative impacts associated with future development on historically disenfranchised communities, and provide opportunities for existing residents to benefit from the necessary improvements being made within or near their neighborhoods.

The Equity Framework

We utilized an equity framework to assess the policy/program recommendations informed by our best practices research. The framework is comprised of four criteria to meet the needs of vulnerable populations as the City invests in their communities. Prior to our assessment, we identified several objectives that the criteria and accompanying questions aim to achieve:

- Avoid involuntary displacement of the most vulnerable communities in the face of public and private investment
- Reduce racial and economic disparities related to housing, income, and quality of life
- Utilize prescriptive policies that address needs identified through our community engagement efforts

The criteria were identified by considering three dimensions of equitable development, which include: (1) what the recommendation is, (2) whom it serves, and (3) how the recommendation goals reach the intended outcomes.[1] The criteria are as follows:

1. Fostering Opportunity
2. Practicing Distributive Justice
3. Instituting Accountability
4. Centering Community Voices

Each criteria is accompanied by questions that were used to refine our recommendations. Please be advised that this is not an exhaustive list of questions for each criteria, but the questions used were chosen based on relevance to anti-displacement and their applicability in assessing equity components related to our recommendations.

The overarching equity questions that we began our analyses with are:

1. Which populations benefit and are burdened by the expected outcomes of this recommendation?
2. What unintended consequences may arise through the implementation of this recommendation?

Using This Framework

Thread utilized this framework using an unweighted scoring system that was applied to each equity-related question that aligns with the four criteria. Each criteria contains two related questions. Scoring occurred as follows:

- For each recommendation that met the agreed with the criteria ("Yes") to the following questions, one point was awarded.
- For each recommendation that did not meet the criteria ("No"), no points were awarded.
- If the answer to a question is both "Yes" and "No" or "It depends", than a half point was awarded.
- The recommendations that scored a 1.5 or greater in a given criteria were identified as strongly meeting a criterion's underlying goals

1. Fostering Opportunity

A cornerstone of quality of life and well-being is the freedom to choose where to live, work, and play. Public and private investment into historically disinvested areas can lead to a multitude of externalities like involuntary physical displacement -- as money and resources are invested in the area , those vulnerable to displacement are priced out. Similarly, involuntary cultural displacement can occur as a new demographic - generally White, higher income populations - move in, changing the neighborhood character so that it no longer represents the diverse populations that historically live(d) there.

Vancouver's housing and wage disparities are real and the impacts of a sharply increasing cost of living with a near-stagnant wage increase are wide reaching. As housing cost pressure continues, there is also a pressing need for increased economic prosperity to provide people who do not currently hold a living wage a means of changing their trajectory.

The City must ensure that these have opportunities to prosper economically in order to break the cycle of generational poverty. This means providing - or improving - access to job training into living wage, growth-capable careers and providing means of cultivating and stimulating the local, small business economy.

Goal
Bolster current and future residents' ability to freely obtain, retain, and/or improve their housing situation and economic status.

Equity Questions

- Does this recommendation provide access to opportunities that provide, restore, or maintain residents' ability to choose where to live?

- Does this recommendation provide access to opportunities that restore or improve residents' employment opportunities?

2. Practicing Redistributive Justice

Redistributive justice is typically rooted in addressing economic disparities, class exploitation, and marginalization of those from targeted communities (i.e. people of color, English language learners, etc.). At its core, practicing redistributive justice is about creating pathways toward a more just distribution of assets such as land, wealth, capacity, and power.[2]

Who is in a position of power has a significant impact in the creation of policies and programs to address racial injustice. Historically, the people and systems that have had power over underrepresented groups perpetuated oppression and exacerbated social divides. In order to change the status quo and create lasting, equitable change it is important that resources like wealth and power are redistributed in a way that elevates groups whose identities have historically been left out of decision-making positions.

Redistributive justice is not - and should not be - an activity that is taken on by the City alone. It should be a collaborative process to identify shared visions and goals with community-based organizations and political actors to assess where the disparities lie and how to address them.[3] This also includes more equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens associated with public policy and related development.[4]

Anti-displacement work doesn't happen in a vacuum. Community-based organizations and community champions that advocate for and support communities vulnerable to displacement are a significant asset to progressing anti-displacement goals through the distribution of resources and services, evaluation of policy/program impacts, among others. Therefore, it is important for the City to provide policies and programs that support capacity-building efforts that both help further organizational missions and champions' mobilizing efforts as well as help build means of equitable collaboration between the public sector, local advocates, and nonprofit service providers.

Goal
Identify and recommend strategies that re-distribute power and resources that result in more equal distribution of opportunity and privilege across the community.

Equity questions

- Does this recommendation lead to re-allocation of resources (land, wealth, staff capacity, etc.) or shift in governance to prioritize the needs of underrepresented groups?
- Does this recommendation lead to power redistribution via increased leadership opportunities for underrepresented populations, through offering a means for vulnerable communities to influence decisions, etc.?

3. Instituting Accountability

Holding the City accountable for centering equity in investments, policy making, and program development is integral in the follow-through of implementation and sustainability of equitable development. In this case, accountability manifests through measuring the outcomes of the policies and programs that are implemented and dissemination of those results to the general public.

Policy/program outcomes should be evaluated using objective, quantitative metrics such as the number of housing units built, as well as qualitative measures such as resident satisfaction of their neighborhoods, relationship with their landlords, etc. Doing so helps identify the impacts of policies and whether or not they meet the goals and objectives subscribed to them. Findings from these evaluations should be shared publicly in order to foster accountability with external stakeholders and build trust.

Goal
Build means of accountability in the effectiveness of programs for intended outcomes and the dissemination of those results to relevant stakeholders and the general public.

Equity Questions

- Does this recommendation have outcomes that are measurable using existing data sources so that we can monitor and assess the relative successes and shortcomings of policy/program over time?
- Does this recommendation create or improve transparency about investments and their potential impacts?

4. Centering Community Voices

For anti-displacement policies to be effective, they must be rooted in the past, present, and future of Vancouver's diverse communities. They must take into consideration different cultural needs and values, and taking stock of what assets and resources currently exist within their communities. Findings from the Existing Conditions, Vulnerability Assessment, and Community Engagement report indicate the following.

Communities more vulnerable to displacement (e.g. renters, people with lower incomes, people of color, people with low educational attainment) prioritized the need for rent, utility, food, and medical expenses assistance, noting that a majority (75%) of survey respondents' rents and/or property tax/mortgages have increased in the past year. This aligns with the glaring percentage of renters that are housing cost-burdened at nearly 50% where they are paying over 30% of their monthly incomes on housing-related costs. To combat this, engagement participants identified improving renter's protections and creating more opportunities for financial assistance as priority items.

Among the Hispanic/Latinx community in central Vancouver, Thread found a particular interest in preserving or improving access to/proximity of parks and open space relative to other neighborhood attributes. Half of the Hispanic/Latinx respondents indicated that they would experience substantial financial stress if rents increased by $100 per month. As such, Hispanic/Latinx populations indicated a strong value in strengthening community and renter protections and finding means of stabilizing housing. In order for new housing developments to be culturally responsive to the Hispanic/Latinx community, they should include open and public spaces for gatherings.

Goal

Incorporate community interest and concerns into final policy recommendations, focusing on the interest and concerns of those most vulnerable to displacement.

Equity Questions

- Does this recommendation address the needs prioritized by more vulnerable residents to help them stay in their home or neighborhood?
- Does this recommendation account for the needs prioritized by advocacy groups in Vancouver (NAACP and LULAC)?

Endnotes

[1] Oesterle, A. (2002). Evaluating equity in social policy: a framework for comparative analysis. Evaluation, 8(1), 46-59

[2] Fraser, N. (1996). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Stanford University

[3] Zapata, M.A., & Bates, L.K. (2015). Equity planning revisited. Journal of Planning Education and Research, 35(3), 245-248.

[4] Curren, R., Liu, N., & Marsh, D. (n.d.). Equitable development as a tool to advance racial equity. Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity.