

Whittier's Strategic Plan: Housing

Protect and expand the variety of housing options in Whittier for people at every life stage and economic condition

1. Increase the diversity, accessibility and affordability of Whittier housing.
2. Serve as a resource hub for all residents and property owners/managers.
3. Established and promote a clear, strategic vision for Whittier's built environment.

What have we done so far?

Protect and expand the variety of housing options in Whittier for people at every life stage and economic condition

1

Increase the diversity, accessibility and affordability of Whittier housing.

- ✓ Supported 3 new protected affordable developments
- ✓ Promoted 4d tax credit for moderate rents
- ✓ Supported tenant protection policies
- ✓ Partnered with CURA to identify properties at high risk of displacement

2

Serve as a resource hub for all residents and property owners/managers.

- ✓ Developed resource list on Whittier Alliance website, with particular focus on low income renter resources

3

Established and promote a clear, strategic vision for Whittier's built environment.

- ✓ Surveyed 368 households on neighborhood priorities
- ✓ Reviewed and negotiated 13 different development projects
- ✓ Developed online tracker for new projects with survey tools
- ✓ Partnered with UMN to design development rubric/toolkit

Where have we struggled?

Roadblocks along the way

- Huge volume of development projects has taken time and attention away from on-the-ground community organizing and long-term policy advocacy
- City policies do not get us much (if any) leverage to negotiate around proposed rent levels for projects
- Demographically, active members of the housing issues committee still do not reflect the neighborhood
- Everyone is busy, and it can be hard to move things between meetings

Ideas we haven't acted on

- Organize at the level of an individual apartment building to support co-op conversion (or similar strategy)
- Play conflict mediation role between tenants and landlords
- Design specifics of tenant rental credit program and enroll existing apartment buildings
- Work with a developer from the ground-up to develop a project that focuses on community goals
- Set neighborhood-level goals/vision against which we can test new development

2020-2021 working teams

TEAM

1

Anti-Displacement Strategies

GOAL

Combat displacement through political advocacy and community organizing that brings to life the vision of a diverse community that stands for and with each other.

2

Unhoused Neighbor Support

Uphold the dignity and rights of every person in our community, regardless of where and how they live, and provide meaningful support to unhoused neighbors who are the most vulnerable.

3

Developer Engagement

Advocate effectively for the vision of a diverse, accessible, affordable built environment in Whittier and ensure all neighbors have the chance to speak to and influence new development.

4

Kmart Re-envisioning

Shape the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design and redevelop a major plot of land in the Whittier neighborhood.

Anti-displacement strategies

Goal: Combat displacement through political advocacy and community organizing that brings to life the vision of a diverse community that stands for and with each other.

Current projects:

1. Research and prioritize anti-displacement strategies, including:
 - Community land trusts
 - Tenant opportunity to purchase
 - Just cause evictions
 - Rent stabilization
2. Develop and implement on-the-ground approach to owners/renters of high-risk properties to plan for a 'next owner' strategy
3. Define anti-displacement and set goals for the neighborhood

Starter questions:

- How do we make such a big and complicated topic feel important, immediate, and real for people? What story do we tell about Whittier?
- How do we give people specific, concrete, and meaningful pieces of work to do on this topic?
- What at the criteria for prioritizing different strategies?

Unhousing neighbor support

Goal: Uphold the dignity and rights of every person in our community, regardless of where and how they live, and provide meaningful support to unhoused neighbors who are the most vulnerable.

Current projects:

1. Understand what has been done so far (by government and non-profits) and where they are falling short
2. Support infrastructure or other resources for unhoused neighbors, particularly during this pandemic

Starter questions:

- How can we come alongside existing efforts as an advocate?
- Where is the system falling short right now? How do we stand for change?
- How can we change the way neighbors with shelter see, acknowledge, and interact with neighbors without shelter?
- What are direct, personal ways we can offer support?

Developer engagement

Goal: Advocate effectively for the vision of a diverse, accessible, affordable built environment in Whittier and ensure all neighbors have the chance to speak to and influence new development.

Current projects:

1. Refine/finalize a development review process that is consistent, understandable, and effective.
2. Conduct new outreach to neighbors, particularly when land near them is about to be redeveloped, to make sure people can influence the process.
3. Continue to build community leverage, power, and credibility in negotiations with developers and interactions with the city process.

Starter questions:

- How can we effectively and publicly engage with developers without it consuming so much bandwidth from the housing issues committee?
- How do we hold developers accountable after we support/negotiate on a project?
- Do we need a clearer articulation of an overall vision or can we go project by project effectively?

Kmart Re-envisioning

Goal: Shape the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design and redevelop a major plot of land in the Whittier neighborhood.

Current projects:

1. Build a database/list of neighbors who are interested in being a part of the community planning process.
2. Reach out to adjacent neighborhoods (Lyndale, East Phillips, Central) to discuss potential partnership.
3. Figure out what the city process/plan will be.

Starter questions:

- Do we believe we can effectively advocate for the neighborhood in the context of the city process, or do we need to act independently ahead of them?
- How do we make sure conversations about the Kmart include all voices in a meaningful and representative way?