Opportunity & Mapping Analysis for White Center, WA

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The White Center CDA is a neighborhood organization that is a catalyst for a healthy community and new prosperity in White Center. We bring leadership and vision to attract new investment, promote economic self-sufficiency and strengthen White Center’s social and civic fabric. Partnership is a core value for us because we believe that we must all come together to make White Center a great place to live and do business. Our mission is to promote a high quality of life for White Center residents and stakeholders through the development of authentic leadership opportunities and community-based neighborhood initiatives.

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University partners with people, communities, and institutions worldwide to think about, talk about, and engage issues of race and ethnicity in ways that create and expand opportunity for all. We envision a society and world that is fair and just for all people, where opportunity is not limited by race, ethnicity, gender, or class, where democratic ideals inform social policy, and where all people recognize and embrace the universal responsibility that each person has for the welfare of every other person.
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Equitable neighborhood revitalization aims to create healthy, successful communities of opportunity. Communities of opportunity are those that provide access to high quality education, a healthy and safe environment, sustainable employment, political empowerment, affordable transit, and outlets for wealth building, including sustainable, affordable homeownership. Access to these opportunities in our communities is essential to not only survive but thrive in our 21st century society.

By assuring access to these critical opportunity structures, the likelihood that people can meet their full potential increases dramatically, benefiting both the individual and society as a whole. But these opportunities are spread unequally throughout populations and communities; therefore, bringing opportunity to marginalized communities, and connecting marginalized communities to opportunity throughout the region, requires broad and deep collaboration, meaningful community engagement, a multi-faceted approach, a long term commitment, and the ability to leverage initiatives with public and private dollars.

The Kirwan Institute was commissioned by the White Center Community Development Association (White Center CDA) to assess the opportunities for equitable redevelopment and the robustness of community engagement in White Center, Washington. The Institute’s mission is to partner with people, communities, and institutions worldwide to think about, talk about, and engage issues of race and ethnicity in ways that create and expand opportunity for all. The Kirwan Institute is a national leader in conducting opportunity mapping to support social and racial justice initiatives.

As part of this analysis, the Kirwan Institute compiled findings from a review of reports on White Center, conducted an opportunity mapping analysis of the community and surrounding areas, and synthesized White Center stakeholder interviews to understand White Center’s existing opportunities and challenges for revitalization and civic engagement, and key policy issues moving forward. Several major over-arching themes of the report include:

**Opportunity** – Mapping analyses indicate that White Center is a low opportunity neighborhood. Key challenges included academic achievement, poverty, and slower housing appreciation than King County. The region surrounding White Center is also largely low opportunity, making accessing opportunity difficult for White Center residents.

**Diversity** – White Center’s diversity is a major asset to the community; however, the language barrier often results in lower academic achievement, unemployment, and less community engagement. Services and programs must be available in as many languages as possible.

**Education** – Academic achievement is a major contributor to improved quality of life, but is alarmingly low in White Center – school poverty, and math and reading scores are especially troubling. Interventions are necessary, with a special focus on ensuring English proficiency for all residents.

**Business** – White Center’s business district has had new businesses move in recently and is lauded for its ethnically diverse small businesses, especially markets and restaurants. It experienced lower business vacancy rates than surrounding communities. However, it still deals with issues such as image, crime, and homelessness. The central business district is a major asset to the community and should be developed as much as possible.

**Housing** – Although White Center grew more rapidly than King County in the beginning of the decade, White Center grew more slowly than King County during the second half of the 2000s. The interview process revealed that housing is a contested issue; some in the neighborhood demand more quality affordable housing while others say there is enough and that White Center should focus on building a more economically diverse population through market rate housing. Our analysis does not show that subsidized housing is concentrated in White Center compared to elsewhere in the county. White Center and the surrounding communities should continue to focus on providing high quality, affordable housing in an effort to stay ahead of the potentially recurring gentrification pressures as the region rebounds.

**Annexation** – Annexation was the single most discussed issue for White Center by stakeholders. Whether it is a good idea or bad idea and whether it is by Seattle or Burien, are points of contention. It is an issue likely to be determined in the next few years and it is important that residents are unified around a cohesive vision for the future of White Center, and demand benefits of any future development as a result of annexation redound to the community.

**Transit** – There is little information about transportation access in White Center. Access to convenient, affordable transit is a critical component of a community of opportunity. In order to ensure there are
quality transportation options for White Center residents, a transportation analysis should be conducted.

**A neighborhood intermediary** Given the complexities of issues facing White Center, the diversity of populations, and the existence of competing interests, there is a strong need for a White Center neighborhood intermediary organization that can act as a go-between, convener and mediator amongst community partners. The White Center CDA should continue to strengthen and expand its role in this regard.

The remaining report is as follows. **Section I** provides an introduction and background to key major investments that have taken place in White Center, as well as continuing challenges. **Section II** delves more deeply into an analysis of existing conditions in several major domains, including economic conditions; employment; health; youth and family; education; community engagement; community diversity; crime and safety; housing; economic development; and open space and environment.

**Section III** provides a comparative opportunity mapping analysis for King County and White Center. **Section IV** provides a synthesis of stakeholder interviews and their responses regarding revitalization challenges and opportunities, and the challenges and opportunities for community engagement. In **Section V**, we provide recommendations for the White Center CDA to position itself to move forward with an agenda for equitable, opportunity-driven redevelopment and strengthened community engagement.

Since 1999, over $350 million from foundations, government agencies, and corporations has been invested in White Center. Even with the support systems and improvements in the community, White Center continues to experience many difficulties. According to a 2006 *Making Connections* phone survey of White Center residents, 42% stated that they do not make enough money to pay for necessities and 21% reported not being able to pay their mortgage, rent, or utilities. The recession exacerbated many households’ struggles. Furthermore, as the community improved, the community began to gentrify, reducing neighborhood affordability. The recession lessened these pressures, but the community must be proactive in developing policies

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**I. Introduction & Background**

White Center is a community with many assets. Because of its relative affordability compared to Seattle, White Center has become a welcoming gateway for immigrants and refugees, who arrive, settle, raise families, establish businesses and build social, cultural and religious institutions. However, White Center has also experienced many difficulties, including high poverty and crime, disinvestment, and low academic achievement.

Attracted to White Center because of both its strengths and challenges, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) launched a ten-year investment, *Making Connections*, to create a supportive neighborhood to strengthen families so that their children could succeed. Other foundations and institutions joined the effort and over $350 million has been invested in White Center since 1999. This includes other efforts such as King County’s Community Enhancement initiative, King County Housing Authority’s HOPE VI redevelopment of Greenbridge, the White Center Early Learning initiative and the nascent White Center Promise Neighborhoods initiative. In 2001, the White Center CDA was formed as the community leadership dedicated to the revitalization of the neighborhood. Successes to date have included façade improvement programs, community festivals, and affordable housing projects.

In 2007, the White Center CDA took on a new and expanded role in the community by becoming the home of the *Making Connections* initiative and acting as a neighborhood intermediary on behalf of the community. The CDA expanded its mission to include both the former “place” based work of neighborhood revitalization as well as a newer “people” based role in family development—all wrapped around a strong community building philosophy. Recent successes include park renovations; business district marketing and organizing; neighborhood planning; school and parent engagement; and the first non-HOPE VI affordable housing project in White Center opening fall 2011.
that support existing residents and businesses while encouraging new development.

Amidst the changes and struggles that White Center faces, the community must ensure that White Center continues to develop in the right direction. An analysis of the changes White Center has gone through since 1999, what the current opportunities and challenges are, and what efforts are taking place to improve White Center in the future provide a foundation for the community to determine how to achieve equitable revitalization for the community’s future.

II. Existing Conditions

This section explores the existing conditions of White Center, using twenty-five reports completed on the community between 1999 and 2010 that address a wide variety of issues concerning the community, including academic achievement, job training, housing development, and community engagement. From this document scan, a comprehensive review was compiled that explores the existing conditions for White Center along: economic, employment, health, youth and family, education, community engagement, community diversity, crime and safety, housing, economic development, open space, and environment. It includes not only what these conditions are in White Center, but also addresses how the community has changed in the past decade and reviews some of the current initiatives working to address these issues.

Household Characteristics

Economic

White Center residents continue to struggle more economically than residents in King County overall. In 2008, almost twice as many White Center residents lived at or below the poverty line than King County residents. Because King County has one of the nation’s highest costs of living, many more families were struggling than the 19% who were at 100% Federal Poverty Level. For example, using the self-sufficiency standard, which determines the local income necessary to meet basic needs such as housing, food, child care, transportation, and health care, 69.3% of White Center youth were at or below the local self-sufficiency standard in 2009. Roughly one-third of households reported an economic hardship, 13% postponed filling a prescription, and 17% went hungry in the same year.

The White Center CDA/AECF’s Making Connections was launched in 2004 to help families increase savings, reduce debt, use the EITC, and access affordable housing. The coalition has helped 5,261 White Center residents open and add to savings accounts. The percentage of White Center residents that were saving increased 10% from 2003 to 2009; however, the amount of savings decreased. The average savings/income ratio dropped significantly (.5 to .2) and debt- to-income ratio increased from 1.5 to 1.7 between 2006 and 2009. This illustrates both the successful outreach that has occurred in White Center and the effect of the recession on White Center households. Employment has been a major challenge for White Center residents that has been exacerbated by the recession. In 2009, 16.6% of the White Center workforce was unemployed compared to 9.2% for Seattle. In the same year, one-third of White Center residents did not earn a living wage. From 2003 to 2009, the percentage of White Center households with someone employed greater than 35 hours dropped 10% to 80.9%. The employment rate for young workers 18 to 24 years-old increased from 60.2% to 84.4% from 2003 to 2006, but then returned to 63.4% in 2009.

There have been a number of employment interventions in White Center in the past decade. The AECF’s Making Connections work in White Center was instrumental in convincing Washington State to use White Center and surrounding low-income neighborhoods as the pilot area for the Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) program which has served 2,450 White Center residents since 2005. Among its many services, the BFET program includes vocational preparatory programs, job readiness training, and job placement, partnering with community colleges and job training programs to connect residents to jobs through pipelines to Seattle-Tacoma International
Airport, regional construction and building trades, health care, and other employers. Two year follow-ups on BFET participants that finished the program in 2007 found that 67% found employment with a median hourly wage of $10.89 an hour.

While many employment indicators improved from 2003 to 2006, in large part owing to the concentrated employment effort focused on White Center, much of that progress was lost in 2009, likely due to the recession. Employment in White Center is not expected to improve on its own; the Puget Sound Regional Council estimates that in 2020 one of every two jobs in White Center will be in the service sector, which generally is low-paying with few benefits. Nevertheless, White Center workers were able to access increased benefits through the recession; the number of employed-households with one person receiving full benefits experienced a 10% increase.

**Health**

In 2009, White Center/Boulevard Park ranked in the top of King County’s health planning areas for many of the worst health outcomes. White Center/Boulevard Park had the highest ranking for adolescent births, two and a half times the King County rate, and infant mortality nearly double the King County rate. Pregnant women in White Center also had high rates of late or no access to prenatal care, pre-term births, and maternal smoking. White Center/Boulevard Park had the number one ranking for adult asthma prevalence, heart disease, colorectal cancer, and had higher incidences of adult obesity, diabetes, and diabetes-related deaths. However, White Center/Boulevard Park has experienced notable improvements in certain health indicators from 2008 to 2011, specifically in infant mortality, maternal smoking, and heart disease-related mortality.

White Center has a number of partners working to improve the community’s health. The White Center CDA is a lead partner in a number of White Center schools that link families to health care insurance. Initially started at Mount View Elementary, the outreach program was so successful it expanded to White Center Heights and Beverly Park Elementary schools. Additionally, the Public Health Department advocated successfully for the inclusion of health care information on the kindergarten registration forms at all Highline Public Schools.

The King County Food and Fitness Initiative engages White Center residents in the process of improving health outcomes, starting with school food and fitness, access to healthy food at retail outlets, and creating inviting places for physical activity for children and families. Under this Initiative, specific goals include targeting 10,000 residents in White Center via social marketing to encourage residents to buy healthy foods at local produce markets, and creating and implementing programs to increase a new customer base of 5,000. Another health initiative in White Center is “Be Active Together,” which engages residents of Greenbridge, an affordable housing community, in culturally relevant physical and wellness activities and community building activities.

Even with current health initiatives and improvements, health outcomes continue to be a serious problem in the community. The high prevalence of chronic disease and the high mortality rate due to heart disease and stroke support the need for long-term treatment, health screening, and prevention programs in White Center. A 2008 health survey indicated additional gaps in White Center health care access, including improved access to care for the working poor that do not have health care. Mental health, dental care, and substance abuse treatment were also noted as areas that need improved access.
The 2009 White Center Neighborhood Action Plan outlines many future plans to create a healthier neighborhood, including reducing asthma triggers in low-income households, providing fresh food and healthy activities for youth to reduce obesity, and developing community walking groups.

White Center youth engage in high-risk behaviors in greater numbers than King County youth overall. In a 2002 survey of 10th grade White Center youth, the youth reported higher levels of alcohol consumption, more favorable attitudes towards drugs, lower commitment to school, and less opportunity for positive social involvement in their communities, schools, and families than other students in King County. Youth and families are the central focus of AECF’s Making Connections program; therefore, education and family initiatives have been central to the neighborhood’s revitalization in the past decade.

White Center has access to a number of parenting services, including A.P.P.L.E (A Positive Parenting Learning Experience), which offers parenting classes, and New Futures, which provides a variety of family and youth services. However, past research indicates that more services provided in multiple languages are needed in White Center, particularly Spanish and Vietnamese.

Education

White Center students continue to perform at a lower level than King County students overall. In the 2009-2010 school year, only a little over half of elementary school and middle school students met the state reading test standard and even less met the math test standard; only 29.6% of White Center Heights Elementary School students met the math standard. The English Language Learners did significantly worse on both standards: less than 20% met the reading standard and between 8 and 14% (depending on which school attended) met the math standard.

An important contributing factor to the poor academic achievement indicators is poverty. In the 2009-2010 school year, 82.2% of the students in the zone area qualified for free and reduced lunch, representing the highest concentration of such White Center Promise Neighborhood students within the school district; a rate much higher than the 60.3% for the Highline School District or the state average of 40.4%. High percentages of students eligible for free and reduced lunch suggest that children are experiencing hardship beyond the school walls. School poverty has serious implications not just for students, but for districts, communities, and the region. Research has consistently found that there is a negative effect of high poverty concentrations in school on students’ academic achievement.\(^1\)

Researchers commonly refer to a “tipping point,” that point at which a school crosses a threshold and the challenges associated with poverty in the school spirals beyond the control of the school. Most experts place that point at 50%. At this point, all students’ prospects are depressed. As one study has found, high poverty schools have to devote far more time and resources to family and health crises, security, children who come to school not speaking standard English, seriously disturbed children, children with no educational materials in their homes, and many children with very weak educational preparation.\(^2\)

Additional partners providing services in the community include Southwest Youth & Family Services which provides counseling, family support and high school re-entry programs; Safe Futures which provides case management, leadership and after school programs for youth; YWCA offering a Career Development Center; and Neighborhood House, offering a variety of youth education programs.

2. See Gary Orfield and John T. Yun, Deepening Segregation In American Public Schools (1997), Harvard Project on School Desegregation. See also, What Matters Most: Teaching For America’s Future, A Report Of The National Commission On Teaching America’s Future (Spring 1996): Summary Report. (Racially segregated schools more often rely upon transitory teachers, have curricula with greater emphasis on remedial courses, higher rates of tardiness and unexcused absence, and lower rates of extracurricular involvement).
Another report finds that once the concentration of poverty in a district reaches 60% or above, the district can no longer rely on its own internal efforts to improve outcomes.\(^3\)

Another contributing factor to poor educational outcomes is language. Since six in ten students who attend White Center schools speak a language other than English at home, these results are very important. These early indicators result in lower achievement results for White Center students. In 2009, only 72.2% of White Center students graduated high school on time. Furthermore, very few students taking non-credit classes at the Highline Community College and South Seattle Community College transition from non credit to credit classes.

However, there have been improvements in White Center educational results. Past multicultural summer pre-K programs have reached 600 children to engage and promote learning, especially literacy. More children are assessed ready for kindergarten, rising from 21% in 2005 to 31% in 2008. White Center has made measurable improvements since the 1990s, but much more is needed

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3. Poverty and Race Research Action Council Annotated Bibliography: The Impact of School-Based Poverty Concentration on Academic Achievement and Student Outcomes.

There have been notable improvements in educational achievement, including the number of children assessed ready for kindergarten, which rose from 21% in 2005 to 31% in 2008.

White Center’s development depends on community involvement, and the White Center CDA, the Highline Public Schools, and other local organizations have had great success engaging residents. In 2009, two-thirds of all White Center adults were active in at least one community organization, such as a neighborhood group, parent-teacher association, or a religious group, and one-third volunteered. Residents also utilize community programming; a little over one-third of households utilized community college, adult education, and recreation or community centers. About 20% of households used employment services and roughly 13% used family counseling.

Community engagement has had very tangible results in White Center. For example, mobilized residents helped to pass a school construction bond issue that resulted in White Center Heights elementary which opened in 2003. White Center community engagement played a key role in the state implementation of Basic Food Employment and Training program (BFET), which leveraged more
than $8 million in funding over three years for training and related supports.

Community involvement was instrumental in the implementation of free tax preparation and asset building services, jump starting a county-wide EITC, growing from 1,000 participants in 2002 to 14,000 in 2009, and returning more than $6 million in refunds, including $2 million to White Center alone. In another example, the Annual Community Summit provides 400+ residents an opportunity to network, attend workshops and training, and engage in neighborhood planning efforts. Every year the White Center CDA organizes the Spring Clean, resulting in 600+ residents planting local gardens, cleaning graffiti and making other community improvements.

White Center contains greater racial and ethnic diversity than King County. A greater proportion of people in

**Community Diversity**

White Center are African American, Pacific Islander, or Native American, compared to the population of King County. White Center’s young population is the most diverse portion of the population; in 2000, there was no one single ethnic majority in school-age children in White Center. In 2009, 31.6% of White Center residents reported limited English language proficiency and 17.6% required a translator – a substantial increase from 2003.

Between 2003 and 2009, the number of white U.S. born households decreased from 69.4% to 63.4%, while the percentage of Hispanic immigrant households increased from 9.4% to 15.5%. The vast majority of participants in the “White Center is My Second Home” survey conducted in 2002 stated a willingness from immigrants to be engaged in community problem-solving, illustrating a commitment to White Center and to making it a better place for their families.

The most recent data from Census 2010 shows that an important milestone has been passed: The majority of White Center residents were people of color (53.0%). White Center has struggled with a reputation of crime. Through targeted efforts, White Center has experienced a decrease in crime, but in 2008, White Center still ranked number two in King County in alcohol-induced deaths, homicide rates, and firearm-related deaths. In 2009, roughly a third of households were highly suspicious of neighborhoods and only about half gave the neighborhood a high safety score. The 2010 closure of the King County Sheriff’s Storefront and the uncertainty of re-opening this Storefront in the King County future budget contributes to the overall struggle with crime.

However, only about 2% believed the neighborhood was disorderly and about three-quarters of households said that White Center is a good place to raise children and a little over half of residents were optimistic about the neighborhood’s future. Nevertheless, both crime and the perception of crime continue to hinder economic development in White Center. The 2009 Neighborhood Action Plan outlines plans to reduce crime in the commercial district through environmental design and community activism.

Housing has experienced a tumultuous decade in White Center. AECF’s *Making Connections* supported

White Center community engagement played a key role in the state implementation of Food Stamp Employment and Training program, which leveraged more than $8 million over three years.
The goal of SOPI is to develop mixed-use, mixed-income and affordable family housing in vacant and underutilized lots in the commercial district.

Housing

Affordable housing strategies that helped nearly 100 residents purchase homes. New construction doubled between 2000 and 2005, home sale prices between 1997 to 2006 rose 18.5%, and rents increased 39%. White Center experienced some of the fastest increases of any area in King County, fueled by its relative affordability.

White Center was becoming a prime location for development for the first time in decades, a major goal of many White Center residents. However, as a result, White Center’s affordability was lessened. Approximately 62% of the housing in White Center was affordable to low-income families in 1990. By 2006, only 31% of White Center’s housing was affordable to low-income families.

A survey of residents found that almost half of households moved from 2003 to 2006, meaning that at any point in time a majority of residents are recent arrivals. Of those family households who moved out from 2003 to 2006, 50% were dissatisfied movers, which was the largest percentage in all of AECF’s Making Connections ten cities. Over 60% of households moving in were optimistic newcomers and many stayers appeared to be attached and secure. These trends are consistent with a gentrifying neighborhood.

The recession has slowed some of this growth. While White Center was never in foreclosure crisis, it did experience higher rates of foreclosure and foreclosure risk than King County. White Center can perceive the recession as an opportunity to move ahead of the gentrification curve to avoid the fate of many similar communities. The Strength of Place Initiative (SOPI), initiated by the White Center CDA in 2007 was established to ensure that the benefits of investments made in the community are enjoyed by all families, and that the diversity and affordability of White Center is preserved.

The King County Housing Authority (KCHA) has also illustrated a commitment to affordable housing in White Center. KCHA is conducting a $70 million redevelopment of Seola Gardens, a $165 million redevelopment of Park Lake Homes, and developing new home ownership opportunities at The Terrace. HomeSight is providing home ownership counseling and down payment assistance for first-time low-income home buyers.

In 2007, the Puget Sound Regional Council projected that White Center would add over 600 multifamily housing units over the next decade; whether or not these will include quality affordable housing depends on concerted effort by the community. The experience in Delridge over the last decade, just north of White Center, foretells a dramatic loss of affordable housing when unrestricted rents rise with the market. White Center must continue its strategic efforts to ensure its revitalization continues while at the same time ensuring an affordable housing stock remains.

The White Center Business District (WCBD) has many assets. It is only a short distance to some of the strongest...
Economic Development

regional economic centers, including the Seattle CBD and Port of Seattle marine terminals; has relatively easy access to major transportation assets; has ample public street parking; enjoys scenic water and mountain views; and includes unique ethnically diverse small businesses. Today, White Center’s diverse business district includes a Salvadoran bakery, Cambodian Market, Ethiopian butcher, Mexican tortilla factory, and many ethnic restaurants. Social service agencies and community organizations include Sea Mar Community Health Center, Refugee Federation Service Center, and the Khmer Community of Seattle/King County.

Although the ethnic diversity of the WCBD is considered to be a key asset, the diverse businesses of White Center survive today because of relatively low rents. Businesses in older buildings are paying as little as $9 per square foot for rent, while new buildings are seeking renters at $20 per square foot.

Furthermore, the WCBD continues to struggle with competition from the Westwood shopping center, negative safety perceptions, and few new commercial buildings. Some tenants believe that the current zoning discourages development and, without annexation, potential developers are forced to deal with multiple jurisdictions. WCBD’s image issues are reinforced with vacant and under-utilized spaces. Moreover, there are limited traffic pattern options – especially east to west -- through White Center. Not only does the limited patterns make it more difficult for White Center residents to easily get to employment opportunities outside the neighborhood, but they also could encourage external traffic to by-pass the community altogether for more convenient paths. This could contribute to fewer people driving and taking transit through the commercial core, which creates a visibility problem for businesses.

To address some of these issues, the Strength of Place Initiative (SOPI) intends to highlight WCBD’s unique character, acquire key commercial buildings, and promote downtown White Center as a destination for fresh and healthy food, while also providing technical assistance to develop and retain affordable commercial space to ensure the ethnic, entrepreneurial character of the WCBD. White Center has already initiated a business façade program that is having success improving the image of the WCBD. The 2009 White Center Neighborhood Action Plan outlines goals that include offering skill-building classes and one-on-one business counseling to help businesses and start-up entrepreneurs improve their operations, sales and marketing, and continuing to improve the appearance of the commercial district.

In 2007, an analysis conducted by the University of Washington (UW) found two areas of White Center...
**Open Space & Environment**

In 2007, the University of Washington found that White Center parks were not well connected and had poor access. Since then, White Center has made significant renovations in two neighborhood parks.

White Center has recently renovated two parks, Steve Cox Memorial Park and White Center Heights Park. The Steve Cox Memorial Park boasts the historic Log Cabin, renovated in connection with the 1930s Works Projects Administration/WPA, athletic fields and courts, a walking path, and the White Center Teen Program, which provides after-school recreational programming to neighborhood youth, aged 12 to 19. This park’s renovations, completed in 2008, included an upgraded baseball stadium with a synthetic turf infield. White Center Heights Park experienced an “ultimate park makeover” in 2007 through donations by Starbucks Coffee Company and the work of 1,500 volunteers. A key highlight is a partnership between King County Parks & Recreation and Technology Access Foundation at Lakewood Park. The Foundation broke ground on a 24,000 square foot technology learning center for students of color in the park in the Summer of 2011.

Additional renovations at Lakewood Park include a grass berm amphitheater, community garden, walking trail, pea patch, underground roasting pit, picnic shelter and tables, and enhanced wetlands. In 2009, a partnership between the King County Park, the White Center CDA, the Cascade Land Conservancy, the Washington State Community Trade and Economic Development Grant Program resulted in the construction of an ADA accessible connection between two portions of the park.

The University of Washington’s analysis also noted that White Center’s habitat zones were largely a patchwork of unlinked sanctuaries, leaving little space for urban species to thrive. Habitats have been improved in the White Center green way, including efforts to ensure that native plant species can thrive. Despite these improvements, work remains to be done; the renovated parks are not part of the under-served areas, the connectivity of parks and the lack of accessibility continue to be a problem, and wetlands and other habitat zones in White Center require attention. In 1968, the Kerner Commission Report, in response to the 1960s urban uprisings, noted that “the single overriding
cause of rioting in the cities was not any one thing commonly adduced—unemployment, lack of education, poverty, exploitation—it was all of those things and more.”

The description of the systematic and structural challenges facing distressed communities was repeated nearly 40 years later in a study of concentrated poverty released by the U.S. Federal Reserve and The Brookings Institution. The report authors noted that “[e]ach of the headline issues examined in this chapter—schools and skills, housing, lack of mainstream investment, and limited community capacity—plays a role in perpetuating the disadvantage confronting these high-poverty urban and rural areas today.” The quality of neighborhood conditions affects the life chances of all families and their access to social, political, and economic resources. The powerful effects of neighborhood conditions on life outcomes for residents are well-documented in over forty years’ worth of research. For example, some studies have linked residential segregation to an increased likelihood of being victimized by violence and crime.

High-poverty communities have an indirect negative impact on children’s educational outcomes. Nationwide, children in high poverty urban communities have levels of lead in their blood that are nine times the average, a condition linked to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and irreversible loss of cognitive functioning. Six million children have lost an average of 7 IQ points as a result. Children growing up in very poor families with low social status can also experience unhealthy levels of stress hormones, which impair neural development. The impact of health status on school achievement is so important that an estimated 25% of the “achievement gap” in education is attributable to difference in child and maternal health.

We also know that school poverty negatively impacts educational outcomes for every student within that school, regardless of individual promise and whether an individual student is poor or not.

Opportunity mapping illustrates the fact that poverty statistics alone cannot capture the dynamics of living in high-opportunity or low-opportunity areas.

III. Opportunity Analysis

Why Opportunity Matters

Opportunity mapping illustrates the fact that poverty statistics alone cannot capture the dynamics of living in high-opportunity or low-opportunity areas.
Thus, it is clear that neighborhood context and access to opportunity, from preventative health care to high-performing schools, can deeply affect children’s opportunities to learn and grow. As stated in the findings of the bipartisan Congressional Millennial Housing Commission in 2002, “Neighborhood quality plays an important role in positive outcomes for families. Stable housing in an unstable neighborhood does not necessarily allow for positive employment and child education outcomes.” This is just one example of how neighborhoods and their lack of opportunity can impact people’s life chances.

**What is Opportunity Mapping**

Opportunity mapping is a way to quantify, map, and visualize the opportunities which exist throughout neighborhoods, cities, regions, and states. This methodology explores which communities have the structures and pathways to opportunity needed to excel and thrive in our society and which do not. Access to opportunity includes obtaining a quality education, living in a safe neighborhood with affordable housing, access to employment networks, access to fresh, healthy foods, and a variety of features similar to these.

Opportunity mapping illustrates the fact that statistics alone cannot capture the dynamics of living in high-opportunity or low-opportunity areas. In this report, the maps of opportunity in White Center provide a more robust evaluation of its existing realities and whether or how its residents are isolated spatially from opportunity.

Conceptualizing opportunity and analyzing it is important for a few reasons. First, as outlined above, decades of social science research have demonstrated that neighborhood conditions and access to opportunity play a significant role in quality of life and self advancement. In view of this, understanding the opportunity landscape is vital in order to improve the quality of life and outcomes of residents.

Second, mapping of these factors has shown that opportunity has a geographic footprint and is “spatialized”- opportunity is unevenly distributed throughout regions and therefore impacts different groups’ access to opportunity structures in different ways. In order to understand opportunity in White Center, we must not only analyze the neighborhood, but we must also understand opportunity across the region. This will provide a clear sense of White Center’s access to opportunity and how it is faring compared to other parts of King County.

For diagnostic purposes, opportunity mapping can provide information to policy makers, community leaders, and advocates that is comprehensive, visually compelling, and easy to understand. These maps can raise significant attention and awareness to the structural and community barriers impacting disadvantaged communities and provide a comprehensive view of opportunity. By looking at multiple indicators of community opportunity...

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14 Housing mobility programs which encouraged people to move into lower poverty neighborhoods have shown improvements along a number of socioeconomic indicators for low-income families when they can leave neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. For example, research on the results of the Gautreaux program provided evidence of improvements in both educational and earnings outcomes. See, Leonard S. Rubinowitz and J. Rosenbaum. Crossing the Class and Color Lines: From Public Housing to White Suburbia. Chicago: U of Chicago Press. 2000. (See Table 9.1 on page 163). Results from the Moving to Opportunity program revealed improvements in health and well-being. See J. Ludwig, J.B. Liebman, et. al., “What Can We Learn about Neighborhood Effects from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment?” American Journal of Sociology 114(1): 182. 2008.

simultaneously, the maps paint a more inclusive picture of neighborhood conditions, and how different groups are situated according to these conditions. Opportunity mapping can also help to assess “gaps” where need is not being met by existing initiatives and identify policies needed to remedy barriers to opportunity for disadvantaged communities.

Lastly, opportunity mapping provides an essential base of information to empower community members with information to ensure that their communities are sustainable, opportunity-rich areas. Once the opportunity ‘situatedness’ of different groups and different places has been mapped out, community members and policy makers can engage in conversations about what kinds of interventions--person, place, or linkages-- can be made to advance access to opportunity. Opportunity maps can provide an entry point for starting consensus building among stakeholders, inform and guide community planning, provide recommendations to help build local organizational capacity in understanding challenges, and provide a collaborative framework to collectively organize the strategic planning of multiple stakeholders in communities.

Mapping opportunity for White Center was done by creating a composite map of layers of selected variables that are, according to research, indicative of high and low opportunity. Data for this analysis has been collected from various sources – U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year estimates, Washington State Report Card from Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), County Business Pattern, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Census, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These multiple indicators of opportunity are assessed in a comprehensive manner at the same geographic scale, enabling the production of a comprehensive “opportunity map” for the region (see Table 1).

The White Center opportunity maps presented in this report contain a compilation of data that falls into three main areas: Education Quality and Opportunity, Economic Health and Mobility, and Neighborhood and Housing Opportunity. Indicators in each of these three domains were first collected separately to calculate an opportunity index and produce an opportunity map for each domain. A comprehensive opportunity index was then calculated by averaging the three opportunity indices, and this was then used to produce a comprehensive opportunity map for White Center, WA.

However, some of the indicators are not gathered based on the same geographic scale. For example, there are data based on the location of facilities, such as school data, toxic waste sites and parks and open spaces, while the number of employment and jobs is based on the Zip code. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analytic methods were employed to re-aggregate non-Census based data to the census tract level. The opportunity map of White Center depicts opportunity in the area with comparisons to both neighboring communities as well as the King County region overall. The full list of indicators can be found in the appendix.

We also want to note that the indicators used for the maps come from various sources collected at various years. The 2011 maps include the most recent data per indicator available now. We also made opportunity maps in 2009, based upon the data available at the time. Nonetheless, the main point of these maps, in particular the “shift” maps, is to show the change over time and how dynamic opportunity is. Importantly, these shift maps are capturing the change that can occur in opportunity, over 3-5 year increments.

These maps can be used to better understand the relationship between access to opportunity and important factors such as race, housing vouchers, subsidized housing, and foreclosures, as well as trends over time. By using

**Methodology & Indicators**

Table 1. Opportunity Indicator List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Economics &amp; Mobility</th>
<th>Housing &amp; Neighborhoods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Proficiency Scores</td>
<td>Proximity to employment</td>
<td>Home Ownership Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Proficiency Scores</td>
<td>Economic climate</td>
<td>Residential Vacancy Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>Percentage of Population on Public Assistance</td>
<td>Neighborhood Poverty Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Poverty or Economic Disadvantage</td>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>Housing price appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Educational Attainment</td>
<td>Mean Commute Time</td>
<td>Crime rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td>Population change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity to toxic waste sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity to parks and open spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foreclosures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
White Center’s population decreased 4.2% between 2000 and 2010, while King County’s population increased by 8.4%.

the opportunity map as a base layer for further analysis, the findings of this analysis are able to demonstrate the relationship between race and place, and how investing in people, places, and linkages to opportunity can affect life outcomes.

Northeastern King County generally contains high and very high opportunity areas while southwestern King County, where White Center is located, has low to very low opportunity areas, as seen in Map A-1. Map A-2 shows that White Center is a neighborhood of low opportunity. Ninety-two percent of White Center’s population resides in very low opportunity census tracts compared to 20% of King County’s population overall (Map A-1). The main indicators driving White Center’s low comprehensive opportunity score are the education and neighborhood condition indicators.

Student poverty and proficiency scores in math and reading were troubling; the only education indicator with a positive score was the student/teacher ratio. The neighborhood condition indicators that most negatively impacted White Center’s score were poverty, housing price appreciation, and population decline. The neighborhood poverty rate for White Center was 18% compared to 10% for King County, the average housing price only increased 6.6% in White Center compared to 10.8% in King County from 2005 to 2010, and White Center experienced a 4.2% population decrease while King County’s population increased by 8.4% between 2000 and 2010.

Opportunity is not static; it is constantly shifting in response to market forces, government policies, community action and so forth. Map B-1 shows that while opportunity levels stayed largely the same or changed slightly between 2009 and 2011 in King County, parts of southern Seattle, which is north of White Center, experienced gains in opportunity.

Map B-2 shows southwestern King County and White Center in greater detail. Not only does White Center consist of low and very low opportunity areas, but it is surrounded by very low to moderate opportunity areas on every side. This leaves White Center residents with few opportunities to access opportunity even in nearby communities. Furthermore, some areas within and next to White Center experienced a decrease in opportunity from 2009 to 2011, as Map B-2 illustrates.

The following sections provide a more detailed understanding of different aspects of opportunity within White Center. The maps focus on indicators including race, income, unemployment, foreclosures, housing vacancies, housing vouchers, subsidized housing, and business vacancies. The maps compare White Center with nearby communities as well as the region overall, providing an illustrative look at the differences in opportunity among places.

◊ All racial groups in White Center experience low to very low access to opportunity

In King County, 46.5% of Black residents and 38.3% of
Opportunity and Race

Hispanic residents reside in very low opportunity areas, while 14.7% of White residents and 23.8% of Asian residents live in very low opportunity areas. Table 2 depicts the opportunity discrepancies among racial groups in King County. Less than 11% of the Black population lives in high or very high opportunity areas. Map C-1 illustrates the connection between race and opportunity in King County, generally finding that the less opportunity an area has, the more racially diverse its population is.

Less than 11% of King County’s Black population lives in high or very high opportunity areas. Ninety-seven percent of White Center’s Black population lives in very low opportunity areas.

Map C-2 shows opportunity and race in southwestern King County, highlighting that although there is rich ethnic diversity in and around White Center it is, unfortunately, concentrated in low and very-low opportunity areas. To compare, Map C-2.1 shows that the White population is concentrated in moderate and high opportunity sections of southwest King County, although White Center and nearby communities have a substantial White population as well.

The poverty rate in White Center is almost twice that of King County.

The household data suggests a close relationship between low-
Household Income

income and low opportunity

The maps of comprehensive opportunity and median household income are very similar, suggesting a close relationship between household income and access to opportunity. See Map A-1 and Map D-1 (King County) or Map A-2 and Map D-2 (White Center) for the comparison. While not surprising, it is a reality that opportunity in King County correlates to higher income communities - a reality that affects White Center, which has almost double the poverty rate of King County overall.

◊ Unemployment rates in White Center remained at a stable but high rate from 2005-2010
◊ Unemployment doubled in many areas of King County

Employment

County

Across King County the unemployment rate increased from 2005 to 2010. In many areas, the unemployment rate was as much as two times higher in 2010 than it was in 2005, seen in Map E-1. Map E-2 illustrates the unemployment rate change in southwest King County. While some areas experienced an increase up to two times the 2005 unemployment rate, other areas experienced a decrease in unemployment. Unemployment changes in southwest King County were directly connected to the unemployment rate of 2005: areas which already suffered from high unemployment experienced a milder unemployment increase (or none at all) and those areas with very low unemployment, such as Mercer Island, experienced the largest increase.

Map E-3 compares unemployment in White Center in both 2005 and 2010. White Center experienced similar rates as surrounding areas, between 5% and 10% unemployment in most parts of the neighborhood in 2010, but in the northeast section of the neighborhood unemployment was over 10%. This suggests that even though the unemployment rates were relatively stable in White Center, they were consistently at a concerning rate.

◊ Over half of the subsidized housing in King County is located in areas of low opportunity, including White Center
Housing Vouchers & Subsidized Housing

White Center does have a number of affordable housing options for moderate-income buyers

White Center has a slightly greater concentration of housing vouchers than other low opportunity areas of King County

Housing vouchers and subsidized housing are concentrated in very low and low opportunity areas of King County, seen in Map F-1 and Map F-1.1. Fifty-nine percent of subsidized housing is located in low and very low opportunity areas, three times greater than the amount located in high and very high opportunity areas. Table 4 shows that almost 70% of housing vouchers are located in very low and low opportunity areas, while less than 15% are located in high and very high opportunity areas.

The amount of subsidized housing units and housing vouchers in White Center is similar to its surrounding areas, seen in Map F-2.1. In White center, all of the subsidized housing and most of the housing vouchers (97%) were in very low opportunity areas of the neighborhood (see Map F-2 and Map F-2.1).

During the interview process, it was mentioned that the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) is concentrating its subsidized housing and housing vouchers in White Center. In order to investigate this claim, we created maps of subsidized housing and housing vouchers in King County, excluding Seattle. Map F-3 shows that there is a large number of housing vouchers in White Center, slightly more concentrated than other areas in King County, but housing vouchers are heavily concentrated in most very low opportunity areas throughout the county.

Map F-3.1 does not show that subsidized housing is concentrated in White Center compared to other parts of the county, although the map does show that subsidized housing is located in very low opportunity areas. Figure 4 is a map of the KCHA’s subsidized housing units, obtained from the KCHA web site that shows subsidized housing sites spread around the county; a number are located in moderate and high opportunity areas.

Nevertheless, it remains clear that White Center – and many other low opportunity areas – have a significant amount of subsidized housing and housing vouchers. Concentrating subsidized housing and housing vouchers can have negative consequences for communities, but KCHA housing provides quality affordable housing options in King County and White Center where a lot of market rate housing is out of reach for low- and moderate-income residents and, therefore, White Center should preserve it.

The vast majority of foreclosures in King County occurred in low opportunity areas

Almost all of White Center’s foreclosures
Foreclosures

occurred in areas of very low opportunity.

Figures suggest predatory lending practices may be thwarting opportunities for first-time home buyers in the area.

Map G-1 shows foreclosures in King County, and Map G-2 shows foreclosures in Southwest King County. It is clear that Southwest King County had a visibly higher foreclosure rate in 2008 compared to the rest of the county.

The foreclosure rate in most of White Center was between 2% and 3%, a rate higher than for King County overall, which was 1.2%. White Center is at the northern edge of the region where the foreclosure rates increased in 2008, seen in Map G-2. The southwest edge of White Center had a lower foreclosure rate, between 1% and 2%. Ninety-two percent of foreclosures in White Center were in very low opportunity areas. The fact that foreclosures occurred more heavily in low-opportunity areas could suggest predatory loans and foreclosures on rental properties, possibly leaving many first-time homeowners and low- and moderate-income renters without a home in White Center.

Residential Vacancy

attributed to the recession.

Southern King County experienced many more residential vacancies than the northern region of the county.

On the whole, residential vacancies in King County increased from 2008 to 2010. In many places, the rate almost doubled, as seen in Map H-1. It is likely that the recession contributed to the overall increase in residential vacancy. While no clear pattern exists, northern Seattle and the more rural areas in east King County fared better overall than the rest of the county; many of their neighborhoods even experienced a decrease in residential

In 2008, White Center and its surrounding area had a higher foreclosure rate than most of the rest of the county.

vacancies.

Map H-2 shows that the vacancy rate in White Center increased from 2008 to 2010, although Map H-3 confirms that these were mild increases. The area to the north of White Center increased more than four times its 2008 level. Looking back even further, residential vacancy rates have been increasing since 2005. This increase could be attributed to the recession.

Map H-3 shows the residential vacancy rates in and around White Center in 2008 and 2010 side-by-side. Some areas around White Center had residential vacancy rates that reached over 5% in 2010. The areas immediately north and east of White Center had high levels of residential vacancy. White Center, on the other hand, had more manageable levels of residential vacancy in both 2008 and 2010.

The northern part of White Center had the highest rates, between 3% and 5%, in both 2008 and 2010. In 2010, the southern edge of the community increased to the same rate. The rest of the community had a residential vacancy rate between 1% and 3% that changed little from 2008 and 2010. The stability of White Center’s residential vacancy through the recession is a positive sign for the community.

Residential Vacancy varied widely throughout White Center and King County.

Many areas experienced only mild increases.
Н3
Business vacancies shifted throughout King County between 2008 and 2010, but the type of change varied throughout the region with no clear pattern, seen in Map I-1. In most places, business vacancies increased moderately, while others stayed the same or even decreased. Southwest King County experienced only a mild increase in business vacancies; many places east of White Center experienced a decrease. Some parts of White Center experienced a decrease in business vacancies as well, seen in Map I-2. The southern part of the neighborhood’s business vacancy rate decreased from over 11% to less than 5%. However, the business vacancy rate in the area north of White Center in 2010 was four times as high as it was in 2008.

Map I-3 shows the vacancy rate in 2008 and in 2010 in southwest King County. White Center is surrounded by areas with high business vacancies, especially directly south and east of the community. This could indicate that White Center may have significant competition from surrounding communities when attracting new businesses; however, it may also suggest that White Center is having success attracting business development.

Although health does not have a separate map set, structural indicators that have an impact on health outcomes are included, such as the proximity to toxic waste sites and proximity to parks and open space. White Center’s location indicates that it is “park-poor” and unfortunately, the reverse is true for toxic waste sites—there are several in the area. There is a substantial amount of research—in fact a whole environmental justice movement developed—that point to the health outcomes of living near such toxic sites. Within White Center there are 5 parks, comprising just 2.8% of the total land area compared with 10.2% in Seattle proper. The lack of open spaces inhibits opportunities for physical exercise, particularly for young people, and research indicates that this may place them at increased risk for obesity related health problems. Finally the lack of sidewalks and walkable streets in some areas of White Center also makes walking less attractive to those in the neighborhood, denying them a natural form of exercise that might help lessen future health risks.

The lack of opportunity in White Center further marginalizes residents; however, maps only provide a snapshot in time, not the future of a neighborhood.

Health

The opportunity maps illustrate a challenging picture of White Center and its surrounding areas. Southwest King County has less opportunity, and the recession has

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16. For example, an analysis by the EPA found that black Americans are 79 percent more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods where industrial pollution is suspected of representing the greatest health risk. See “Into the Wilds of Oakland, CA.” The Daily Beast citing Newsweek, August 1, 2008. Available at http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/08/01/into-the-wilds-of-oakland-calif.html
Looking to the Future

weakened the progress that was being made. Although the community has enviable racial and ethnic diversity, its limited access to opportunity is typical of low-income, minority communities. White Center has fared well in some aspects, such as business and residential vacancies, but nevertheless the overall access to opportunity in White Center is cause for continued community concern.

Unfortunately, the lack of opportunity can further marginalize White Center residents. However, it is important to note that despite the imprint of history, people and places can and do change. Maps provide a snapshot in time, but the geography of opportunity is constantly being built and dismantled. Demographics change, new policies are created to address inequities, economic recessions hit, and the list goes on. Even though history leaves its mark, we can make positive changes in communities by intervening in the patterns of disinvestment and marginalization to produce better access to opportunity for all. Indeed, our interviews with community stakeholders revealed a cautious optimism about the direction of White Center, and the possibilities for redevelopment and enhanced engagement.

As part of our analysis, we conducted twenty interviews with a broad range of stakeholders representing the business community, residents, school district,
community organizations, policy makers, and funders. Their responses on the challenges and opportunities for revitalization and civic engagement are summarized below. The list of questions is provided in the appendix.

Opportunities for Revitalization and Community Assets

White Center residents overwhelmingly pointed to the area’s ethnic diversity as an important asset that could be utilized to foster positive growth. Respondents pointed to the plethora of ethnic restaurants, largely from Southeast Asia and Latin America, as well as other immigrant-owned businesses as being an advantage of the neighborhood. One respondent claimed that it was a “Mecca for people wanting a non-downtown Seattle experience” because of the diverse cultural opportunities.

Residents also pointed to the working-class sensibilities of the neighborhood and its close-knit, community feel, given the diverse cultural, linguistic, and political differences between residents. The work ethic and community spirit were resoundingly hailed by all respondents, one claiming that “relative to other communities, there seems to be a sense of neighborhood, and people are really energized around this.”

The affordability of the neighborhood was also cited as an important asset for White Center. Compared to the expense of living in many neighborhoods in King County – especially in and around downtown Seattle – White Center has been viewed in the last decade as an affordable and relatively close alternative to middle-class and younger populations. Respondents credited the White Center Community Development Association and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, among others, as doing a lot of work to keep the community’s character intact and ensuring quality affordable housing so that residents are not pushed out of the community as new development occurs.

Another asset identified was White Center’s proximity to Seattle. While not a part of the city, White Center’s thoroughfares provide relatively easy access not only to Seattle’s downtown core, but also to Seattle-Tacoma Airport, Boeing Airport and employment centers, the Seattle Port areas, as well as other communities to the south. One interviewee suggested that these thoroughfares may become more important as lengthy infrastructure programs begin on the Alaskan Viaduct to the west, and the South Park Bridge to the east.

The neighborhood’s schools and their involvement in the community were seen as positive features in White Center. A particular point of pride for some respondents was the new White Center Heights elementary school. As respondents described, the schools, as well as the libraries, provide the neighborhood with venues for community engagement and capacity building that many communities with similar demographics do not have. In addition to those venues, the area boasts two community college branches and both were reported to be engaged in community events. The level of community organization and volunteerism in the neighborhood was also reported as being very high.

Respondents pointed out a wealth of different grass-roots organizations in the area, including two larger umbrella organizations, the White Center CDA and the North Highland Unincorporated Area Council. According to respondents, these organizations, along with others, were instrumental in service delivery to the elderly, children, and other low-income residents in the neighborhood, as well as in engaging regional partners such as the King County Council, the City of Burien and the City of Seattle. While respondents wished for more cohesion between these groups and a greater effort to engage a wider group of community members, there was a definite sense of excitement about the potential for these organizations to greatly assist in revitalizing the neighborhood.

Respondents identified several impediments to redevelopment in White Center, many of them related to the larger problem of White Center’s status as an
Impediments to Opportunity and Revitalization

unincorporated area of King County. Respondents listed numerous challenges associated with its unincorporated status, including collecting enough tax revenue for revitalization, the ongoing problem with crime from outside the neighborhood related to the thin police presence in the area, a lack of community cohesion and purpose, and the lack of power at the regional level.

One respondent put it thusly, “engagement is vital to gaining political notice and investment, and White Center won’t be taken seriously without public power.” Another respondent claimed that the poverty occurring in the area was because of a lack of a voice and political power at the regional level. Other respondents pointed to the difficulty in getting businesses to locate in White Center because of its unincorporated status.

High poverty and high crime – both perceived and real – were often cited as limiting revitalization opportunities. White Center and the surrounding North Highline area has long been seen as a lower-middle class area; a rash of highly publicized crimes during the last couple of decades along with gang problems and a problem with homelessness tarnished the neighborhood's image throughout the region.

While most respondents reported that the gang activity and most of the crime has been on the decline for a considerable amount of time, thanks in large part to block watch and after school youth programs started within the community, the image remains a major impediment to growth and is proving difficult to change due to the lack of advocacy at the regional level. One respondent asserted that it was the biggest single barrier to revitalization.

Although a major asset, the diversity of the community was reported to make community organizing and advocacy difficult. Linguistic and cultural barriers are an enormous challenge to speaking with one voice as a neighborhood. A respondent summed it up succinctly by saying, “Just the fact that there are so many different cultures...it’s hard to meld together into a coherent discussion...the diversity can be challenging.” Political differences are also an impediment to strong community cooperation. The wide diversity of White Center and the surrounding unincorporated area means that there are many different visions of the community and how it should grow in the future. According to various interviewees, differences over ideas, strategies, and priorities have hampered efforts to rally around shared concerns, such as annexation.

There are a number of regional and national trends and conditions that respondents reported as having a large effect on White Center’s revitalization efforts. These include:

Regional Trends, Policies, & Programs Impacting Revitalization Opportunities

Annexation issues. For respondents, the issue of annexation looms large for White Center. Annexation was almost universally pointed to as a challenge for the neighborhood by all interview respondents and was seen as being part of multiple problems within the community. The Washington Growth Management Act virtually guarantees that unincorporated urban areas such as White Center will be annexed by a neighboring city in the coming years. However, recent budget shortfalls in surrounding cities such as Seattle have delayed plans for the annexation for White Center and have left the area in an administrative limbo. Analysis of the collected interviews has revealed several stark divisions about annexation throughout the community.

One barrier to annexation is public opinion. According to several news reports and council meeting transcripts on the annexation issue, support for the annexation of White Center is at best mixed in both Seattle and Burien, with residents raising concerns about the fiscal feasibility of...
could leave White Center without valuable social services and safety resources. The doubt and apprehension created by the unresolved annexation issue is having a negative effect on White Center’s chances at business development and some respondents believe that it creates a dangerous ‘no man’s land’ where the safety and policy jurisdiction is unclear.

**Recession economy.** The wider economic recession is seen as having affected White Center residents and businesses especially hard. Respondents reported that White Center workers, many of whom have limited English capabilities and are under-educated, and have had problems finding jobs. Some businesses have had to close, leaving vacant properties that are taken over by predatory businesses and criminals. Interestingly, the downward trend in the economy has brought about a renewed sense of community among White Center residents. For example, prior to the recession some respondents viewed the community as being disconnected and having many apathetic residents. However, now residents have come to see the benefits of community action. As one respondent put it, “I think the slowing economy’s been good for us; it’s created a lot of individuals who want to start their own business, several places to start it. People who live in the community value it more instead of seeing it as a transitional area.”

Annexation was almost universally pointed to as a challenge for the neighborhood and was seen as contributing to multiple problems within the community.

**Low Socioeconomic Status.** Respondents stated that its status as a poorer community compared to surrounding communities, such as Burien and Seattle, create challenges for the community, especially because there is less tax revenue to fund development initiatives. However, respondents also noted that the property prices tend to be lower which may attract young homeowners.

While some residents see the large population of low- and moderate-income residents in White Center as a natural trend in the region, others see a more purposeful result of regional policy decisions. A few respondents claimed that the King County Housing Authority was purposely locating low-income housing in White Center in order to satiate the City of Seattle’s desire for low-income housing outside of the city limits. One resident claimed that the “biggest issue is economic segregation. The community has been designated to be the home to inundation of...
poverty. King County is concentrating poverty in White Center because we have no political power.” Regardless, this demographic shift has driven more immigrants to settle in the White Center area alongside older, white, and more established neighbors.

**Gentrification.** Before the recession, White Center was reported to be an attractive area for redevelopment by real estate developers. The area’s location and unincorporated status made it an attractive location in terms of proximity and escaping Seattle city prices. Even though the recession has lessened some of these pressures, many respondents still reported real fears that low-income residents and ethnic businesses might be pushed out as the economy turns around.

**Lack of TIF funding.** The Constitution of the State of Washington prohibits state or municipal agencies from instituting Tax-Increment-Financing programs that could help provide incentives for businesses to relocate to White Center. Many respondents thought that an empowerment zone from the federal government might create the same opportunities for business relocation, but the general consensus was pessimistic about gaining such a designation.

**Language as a barrier to employment.** Many workers, particularly in the immigrant community, do not have the right skill set for the labor available to them. One respondent articulated her frustration at this challenge: “…even now, we have a lot of opportunity for [immigrant workers] to go to school and do training, but again, with the language barrier, and if they are older, what do you expect? However, many residents are willing to work lower paying jobs and have a very good work ethic, which could make them attractive to businesses willing to train less expensive workers. However, there is a danger of exploitative employment as well.”

**Housing stock revitalization.** Due in part to subsidized housing initiatives by the King County Housing Authority, Hope VI, and other partners, White Center has seen a great deal of new residential construction over the past decade. Respondents had varying opinions about the overall effects of this housing, some praising it for bringing more quality affordable housing into the neighborhood and getting rid of blight, while others see it as the cause of a concentration of poverty and low tax revenues for the area.

**Transportation/Infrastructure Challenges.** Respondents cited a number of transportation projects, including the South Park Bridge, that have been neglected by all levels of government in the area. Respondents noted that the regional public transportation system also does not serve White Center residents well, offering very little in transportation options throughout the neighborhood or to economic opportunities in the northern part of the county. However, respondents also noted that the downturn in the economy has made White Center more attractive as a place to live where travel to downtown Seattle is still relatively easy and cheap.

Community engagement was seen as an important component of White Center’s revitalization efforts by most of the respondents. One respondent summed up the imperative of engagement by stressing, “Sometimes it’s not about money; it’s about keeping people engaged. The power is in relationships. We don’t have wealth, but we do have community relationships that are our strength. People throw around human capital, but we’ve had that all the time. We just need to learn that as human beings, we’re all very relational.” Community engagement, particularly where it is related to political and economic conditions within the region, was cited as crucial to redevelopment efforts.

Community engagement is generally seen as good and quite effective, albeit not always involving a large group of residents. The neighborhood boasts a good number of
local initiatives related to youth development and safety, and institutions such as the local school district and the local library are said to be heavily involved in community activities. Many community activities, such as the Spring Clean (yearly attendance of 600+) and the Annual Community Summit (yearly attendance of 400+) are well attended, and the block watch program was repeatedly noted as being generally very active and a contributing factor to the decrease in crime over the last decade.

Respondents also reported that there are many faith-based institutions that are very involved in community matters. For example, the local Lutheran church is looking into the feasibility of utilizing its building for community use after they no longer need the building, and a national faith-based group, World Vision, has warehouse facilities in the area and reportedly does volunteer work with local children. Also noted were donations of time, money, and effort by local businesses on behalf of local improvement activities such as ESL programs, and joint programs with local schools. Respondents also described a good deal of self-initiated volunteer work with elderly residents in the area, the White Center Food Bank, and an elementary school produce market.

Even though there are many opportunities to participate in community events, many respondents claimed that the engagement was very uneven, with the same relatively small group of people being engaged in local matters while many residents remained disengaged. The reasons for this varied in their particulars, but divisions among cultural, linguistic, racial, political groups, and even geography were universally seen as the determinants. For example, one resident described how there are “a lot of ethnic groups, and usually the parents don’t see how they can be involved in the school [because of] language barriers.” Another barrier to participation noted by some respondents was the varying level of skill and familiarity with community engagement, especially from immigrant populations. Those who possess the skill or genuine interest in community organizations to start out with were seen as easier for local organizations to reach out to, and therefore, more readily selected for activities.

**Barriers to Community Engagement**

Respondents noted how the same diversity which provides strength and character to the neighborhood can also work to inhibit civic engagement at times. Cultural and specifically linguistic differences can make some people uncomfortable at engagement activities. Cultural differences concerning verbal communication and the role of women were also described as a challenge. For example, one respondent noted the challenge of engaging Iraqi women.

Other respondents described how residents from some cultures do not have a model of civic engagement that would enable them to easily fit into traditional notions of engagement utilized in the US. Even the notion of community may be different to some newer residents who may have only been in the neighborhood and the region for a short time and who see themselves as more transient. Many respondents suggested that a new way to engage this population may be necessary.

Respondents from immigrant populations had especially insightful responses, sometimes brutally honest, about cultural barriers to engagement. One respondent noted that involvement often occurred on ethnic lines; for example, if a Latino came to a meeting and no other

“Sometimes it’s not about money; it’s about keeping people engaged...We don’t have wealth, but we do have community relationships that are our strength.”
still, many residents do not know of engagement activities, according to respondents. because much of the work of these organizations is not visible to the public at large, they run the risk of being seen as ineffective. one respondent claimed that many in the neighborhood have become apathetic due to past failures. “in the day-to-day, walking down the streets, [asking people] how to make things better, there seems to be a tenable resignation…” it seemed clear to many that new strategies were needed to build more community engagement in white center.

many of the materials and notices for events are only printed in english and spanish, alienating a majority of the cultural groups in white center. for example, the highline public school district web site is only presented in spanish and english, which may work to alienate the large asian population in the community. one respondent expressed her frustration this way, “this says to other groups...you can have any language...but for in the schools...it’s not fair to have only dual language, you have dual language in school, what happens to the other kids?”

the unincorporated status of white center exasperates this transitional feel and also interferes with neighborhood cohesion. the neighborhood contains two different entities who are largely concerned with community development activities, as well as a number of other smaller, more acute organizations that at times, have problems coordinating activities. the varying neighborhoods and interests has led to a disconnection and sometimes tensions between groups from different areas, primarily between newer immigrants from asia and latin america and older, more established white residents who live in a different part of the unincorporated area.

time and location constraints also play a role in impeding community engagement. many residents work several jobs and cannot easily engage in certain events. a couple of respondents claimed that this problem is exacerbated by the lack of adequate childcare in the area and the lack of affordable health insurance among residents. this is particularly damaging when it comes to youth and educational initiatives, where parental engagement is crucial: “[there is] not a lack of interest, but lack of opportunity, some may want to participate, but do not have child care or other support to participate.” in addition, some activities have had problems finding a venue. one respondent claimed that the neighborhood only contained two real venues for engagement, the library or the local bar. some residents are unaware of where events are located or have problems getting to events because of inadequate public transportation.

multiple respondents noted the difficulty of getting certain populations engaged because of cultural and linguistic barriers.

latinos were at the meeting, they would think that the meeting was not meant for them. another resident claimed that the vietnamese community in white center was underserved at the expense of latino residents who were more culturally adapted to the civic engagement style of the community.

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a substantial amount of respondents pointed to building more leadership among community members, particularly young people. there was a sense that increasing
Improving Community Engagement

Youth involvement was paramount in continuing any engagement currently being done and ensuring that the community stayed safe. One interviewee, a resident of the community, put it this way “Younger and little ones are important in White Center. Those people are our future. Education, health, if you abandon these things, the kids are going to look around and try to find another way to get it.”

Another suggestion was to make civic engagement more authentic and culturally relevant to the population. The White Center CDA’s Family Ambassador Program connects parent ambassadors to families using the home languages to alleviate language barriers and a culturally competent approach at White Center Heights Elementary and Mt. View Elementary. This kind of creativity could lead to more cross-cultural engagement and eventually lead to a more unified and stronger voice at the regional level. Respondents suggested working with Family Ambassadors, ethnic mutual assistance associations, and local cultural festivals and faith-based activities to combine ethnic traditions with civic engagement.

One respondent suggested a more professional feel to the civic engagement efforts, paid engagement personnel, and more involvement from the Chamber of Commerce. A few respondents said that being annexed would improve engagement in White Center. “For unincorporated areas, there’s not the same representation. There’s one council member among nine. Issues can get diluted…Although the county wants to serve the community well, [it] doesn’t have the same community identity…This is why annexation would be good, to help with representation and to be part of a community with a strong identity.” Having representation at a more localized level can provide White Center residents a greater ability to have a voice in regional issues. With annexation, representatives may be more able to address White Center residents’ concerns, which can encourage residents to become engaged. Through targeted investment, continued migration of immigrants, gentrification, and the recession, White Center is a different community in 2011 than it was in
V. Recommendations

1999. It has experienced a rise in home prices, improved academic interventions, and new business development, but residents continue to struggle with unemployment, low academic achievement, and poor health outcomes. White Center has made great strides towards revitalization, but must now validate its strategies in the face of its current obstacles, reaffirming existing efforts while considering new ideas. The following section includes recommendations for policies and programs that White Center should work towards in its efforts to develop a more equitable future.

The first section includes the recommendations from the Communities of Opportunity model, which provides a framework for White Center to create opportunities within the community and to connect residents to opportunities available outside the community. The second section details recommendations developed from the existing conditions analysis, stakeholder analysis, and opportunity analysis, which combined, provide an understanding of the more unique issues facing White Center and point to more specific suggestions of what policies and programs White Center should focus on for revitalization.

The Communities of Opportunity model has two goals: to bring opportunities to opportunity-deprived areas and to connect people to existing opportunities throughout the metropolitan region. The model emphasizes investments in people, places, and linkages. White Center must build human capital through improved wealth-building, educational achievement, and social and political empowerment. The community will thrive through strong, supportive neighborhood development initiatives, attracting jobs with living wages and advancement opportunities, and demanding high-quality local services for all neighborhoods, such as local public schools that perform. White Center also needs to encourage better links among people and places, fostering mobility through high-quality public transportation services and region-wide housing mobility programs.

The Communities of Opportunity model also supports sustainable and responsible growth, primarily through directly bringing an equity lens into analysis. Sustainable growth should seek to reduce barriers to reaching sustainable employment for low-income workers and families. Sustainable and responsible growth principles should ensure that housing policy does not support concentrated poverty. Sustainable growth should also ensure that the fair housing rights of all residents are upheld and that low-income families, especially families of color and immigrant families, do not find their housing options reduced to only a few segregated, distressed neighborhoods. The opportunity model seeks to balance the priorities listed above, to both revitalize distressed communities while also providing life-changing pathways to opportunity for marginalized families and communities.

By adopting an opportunity-oriented model of development and empowerment, we can address the systemic and structural barriers that cumulatively work to deny opportunity and advancement to marginalized people and communities. The model is focused on empowering communities by re-orienting the levers and pathways of opportunity; in essence, re-orienting the structures that produce disadvantage and making them work for marginalized populations. By allowing a creative...
space for individuals and communities to achieve their potential, we can produce a healthier and more robust democratic society.

The Communities of Opportunity model supports planning which is sensitive to a targeted universal approach. Universal goals, such as good schools and quality housing, are important criteria for driving planning processes and policy, but they should not preclude using unique strategies and targeting resources to communities based on their varying needs and economic condition. In order to actually reach universal goals, policy responses which are sensitive to the needs of varying populations, such as the diverse needs of White Center’s residents, are more likely to be successful. This section includes specific recommendations that the White Center CDA, the community, and government and regional partners can pursue to bolster their efforts in equitable development.

**Bolster organizational coordination.** A common criticism among interview respondents was a lack of cohesion among the many community organizations in White Center. While these groups accomplish much good in the community, their efforts are often at cross purposes from one another or lack the effectiveness that they may otherwise have with a greater support network. By working toward greater cooperation among organizations in White Center, each group will have a wealth of new resources and strategies at its disposal and the efforts of each group will help support the others. The White Center CDA, as a neighborhood intermediary, has started down this path with the development of the Neighborhood Action Plan, which represents a collaboration of more than 50 neighborhood organizations.

Given the stakeholder responses, these efforts should be strengthened. Ways this could occur include:

◊ Bringing groups together to cooperate on win-win initiatives and strategies. This can help build trust, cooperation, and support between organizations that can lay the ground work to tackle more sensitive topics cooperatively at a later date.

◊ Providing support for the initiatives of smaller community groups. Providing logistic and strategic assistance to less established groups within the neighborhood can help build capacity and leadership among community members while connecting community services to larger initiatives.

◊ Providing a space for collaboration between disparate neighborhood groups.

**Provide services in as many languages as possible to reach residents of many cultural backgrounds.** There are more than fifty languages spoken in White Center and many people have limited English language abilities. The diversity of White Center is a major strength of the community, but language is a significant barrier in employment, education, and community engagement, and several stakeholders mentioned this as a challenge for White Center. Therefore, offering services in many languages, bridging cultural barriers, and creating culturally relevant activities are necessary to help residents, especially the immigrant population, be successful while at the same time strengthening community cohesion among residents of different cultures.

**Pursue culturally relevant engagement strategies.** Actions taken by civic organizations should have a direct and meaningful impact on the concerns of residents from every culture and should be undertaken in a manner that is relevant to the various cultural groups in the area. White Center cultural festivals and events are great ways to initially engage ethnic communities in community improvement strategies. Larger organizations should 19. For examples of successful collaborations among different ethnic groups, see The Kirwan Institute, “Building Successful Alliances between African American and Immigrant Groups: Uniting Communities of Color for Shared Success.” March 2010. Available at http://www.kirwaninstitute.org/2010/03/21/building-successful-alliances-between-african-american-and-immigrant-groups/
partner with ethnic and family-oriented organizations in the area to connect to the immigrant communities and allow them to become more engaged in a more comfortable setting.

Make civic engagement opportunities more convenient for the local population. Many respondents claimed that time conflicts were a barrier to community engagement in White Center. The rigors of childcare, employment and other life responsibilities mean that the opportunity to engage in more traditional community activities is limited.

Making engagement more flexible to the residents, including scheduling some activities or programs during weekends, evening or early morning hours, or splitting activities into more manageable time frames, may provide opportunities for residents to become involved while showing them that community organizations are responsive to their needs. Similarly, with a more robust childcare support network, many more residents would have the opportunity to become involved in community events. This is one of the event guidelines that the White Center CDA has adopted and is encouraging other neighborhood organizations to do as well.

Pursue engagement strategies that provide many different ways to be engaged. Such strategies could include using the internet and social network sites, such as Facebook, to relay information and conduct surveys, as well as more intensive efforts such as door-to-door organizing. Providing a wide range of opportunities for engagement allow residents to make full use of their existing skill set, interests, and personality traits. Many community events already provide opportunities for residents of many skill sets and interests to get engaged, including neighborhood clean-up efforts such as White Center CDA’s Spring Clean and the community input sessions on short- and long-range planning such as the White Center Community Summit. Other engagement opportunities may include mentorship programs for young adults with local businesses, utilizing neighborhood volunteers for the development of affordable housing, or local fundraisers for community schools. Activities can also range in intensity, depending on the project and goals of engagement process, low-intensity engagement efforts, such as “dot exercises” may be more appropriate; in other situations, higher intensity strategies such as focus groups or the co-designing of a community conversation with neighborhood residents will be more ideal.

Create opportunities for youth involvement and leadership in civic engagement activities. Another theme in the responses gathered about White Center was the need for youth leadership in community activities. In order to sustain the community initiatives begun today, White Center must develop leadership, skill, and a sense of community among the youth. Creating a connection between well-established youth programs in local schools and churches and well-established community organizations can help elevate the impact that both have on the community, strengthen the viability and sustainability of the youth programs, and help young people develop the skills necessary to carry these programs further.20

In order to sustain the community initiatives begun today, White Center must develop leadership, skill, and a sense of community among the youth.

Economic Development

Center residents. According to a survey completed in 2003, 2006, and 2009, efforts to improve socioeconomic conditions for White Center residents, such as those of the White Center CDA/AECF’s Making Connections and the Basic Food Employment and Training program were successful. These programs helped immigrants transition into the community by connecting them with resources in multiple languages, providing financial coaching, and working on producing local jobs in connection with regional public infrastructure projects. However, residents were hard-hit by the recession, and the opportunity mapping analysis demonstrates the pervasiveness of low economic opportunity in the community and areas immediately adjacent. Now more than ever, these financial and asset-building resources are important for White Center residents who continue to struggle with poverty and unemployment.

Develop a culturally competent jobs pipeline. A viable jobs pipeline is one that takes workers from an entry level position to an end goal of a living wage career while providing wraparound services necessary to thrive. This includes removing possible barriers to furthering employment like multi-lingual training, nontraditional or off site training sites, and financial literacy. The White Center CDA could take a lead role in convening other community organizations and local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, community colleges, and so forth on the possibilities for developing such a line.

Enhance the attractiveness of the White Center Business District. Developing an economically diverse commercial sector can help White Center gain economic independence and help to create partnerships that may provide opportunities for low-income residents to find economic opportunities within their own neighborhood. Developing a vibrant business district is essential to the success of White Center businesses. An immediate concern is ensuring that it is clean and safe. White Center must also provide attractive commercial spaces, streetscapes, and ample parking to draw business development. Additionally, White Center might also consider bringing more traffic into the WCBD through a transit transfer station, a hub location for buses and possible future light rail lines to converge for riders to make transfers. This brings a greater amount of people into the business district, people walking to and from the transfer station through the community, creating and

Developing an economically diverse commercial sector can help White Center gain economic independence and provide economic opportunities for low-income residents.
Chamber has not been fully resourced and staffed, and has in more recent years partnered with the Chamber to leverage its work, specifically related to marketing the district’s diversity, identifying the right business mix to encourage business recruitment, and implementing a commercial revitalization plan that focuses on Main Street principles. Further coordination and articulation of roles is necessary so as not to confuse stakeholders and possible funders of both organizations. However, a successful partnership between the Chamber and the CDA can be a model for the neighborhood and respects the history of how both organizations have formed, grown, sometimes weaned, and now co-exist together.

Respondents had several suggestions for defining and strengthening the role of the Chamber in the community, including:

◊ Advocating for efficient revenue gathering and distribution by the county and acting as a partner in code improvements by local businesses. The Chamber of Commerce is a natural partner in assisting local businesses in meeting local building and zoning codes while ensuring that government revenue is efficiently collected and used for the benefit of White Center residents.

◊ Acting as the central regional advocacy group and “fair broker” in the neighborhood. As the representative of the business community of the rather large unincorporated area encompassing White Center, the Chamber of Commerce and the White Center CDA would have the necessary influence to have a voice in regional development policies, as well as provide a common denominator for residents who may disagree on other issues.

◊ Supporting efforts and policies aimed at proper revenue gathering, such as collecting taxes from delinquent businesses and developments in White Center or business supported self-taxes for collective use. Supporting these efforts ensures that more revenue will be available at the county level and that White Center will be well-positioned to benefit from that revenue increase. The White Center CDA is currently exploring these ideas with the Chamber.

**As the single most remarked upon challenges during stakeholder interviews, it is clear that continued community conversations around annexation are needed.**

Develop community consensus around the annexation issue. One of the single most remarked upon challenges to revitalization in White Center was its unincorporated status. Respondents expressed concern over the fact that the community has yet to develop consensus around the issue. There is a clear need for continued community conversations around the issue. The White Center CDA should continue to convene these conversations. Several such conversations should be held in order to reach the most groups possible, and should explore the challenges and opportunities associated with annexation, and provide space to discuss as a community any concerns that might arise.

The development of community consensus could in turn help White Center become a more attractive annexation target and may help both the residents of White Center and the corresponding municipality overcome challenges presented by budgets and public opinion. The annual update of the Neighborhood Action Plan is one tool that can be used to communicate the community’s assets, and concerns, to people outside the neighborhood.

**Advocate for the institution of TIF programs.** Currently, the Puget Sound Regional Council, whose mission is to ensure a thriving central Puget Sound now and into the future through planning for regional transportation, growth management and economic development, is working on a feasibility analysis to institute a TIF program in Washington State. The study will present the types and structure of TIF programs available, opportunities and barriers to instituting TIF, and outlining steps to implement, starting with a constitutional amendment. Under a Sustainable Communities framework, the Seattle Community Development Corporation Collaborative, of which the White Center CDA is a part, is working with the Council to ensure that its feasibility study incorporates an equity framework to ensure that communities in transition, especially low-income families and communities of color, benefit from the program and ensure that the program incorporates a holistic community and economic
development strategy. Innovative use of TIF programs can also provide a funding mechanism for communities under threat of gentrification, to implement policies that protect against displacement, for businesses and residents (more below).

**Pursue anti-gentrification efforts and long term affordability options.** The potential for gentrification, given White Center’s affordability and proximity to Seattle, was cause for concern for many stakeholders. And in fact, White Center had experienced some gentrification pressures during the housing bubble of the early 2000s. The good news is that there are specific policies that White Center can adopt that can mitigate the negative effects of gentrification, such as displacement, and ensure that White Center is able to sustain economic growth in a manner that will protect the existing community and its residents. Such policies might include set-asides for new development, or density bonuses for developments that include a certain percentage of affordable units. Small business façade or development grants and home improvement grants or property tax relief programs can help existing residents and businesses remain in place. Some of this work is already being done. For example, one important program that ensures affordable housing in White Center is the partnership between the White Center CDA and Habitat for Humanity of Seattle-King County on an owner-occupied housing repair program that is based on a community building and engagement model to foster resident leadership and connect homeowners to valuable asset building programs, such as a culturally competent jobs pipeline and training. More programs like this, that take a holistic view, are needed.

The opportunity mapping analysis found that a large share of foreclosures were concentrated in the lowest opportunity neighborhoods. One option to create sustainable, long-term affordability in the community could be pursued through creation of shared equity programs. These initiatives allow income-eligible families to purchase homes at below market rates, and in return for the subsidy, the potential gains from the resale of the home are restricted, thereby maintaining the affordability of the home for future families. Shared equity programs, such as the program at A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) in eastern King County, have been found to successfully create homeownership and wealth-building opportunities for low-income families; maintain a stock of affordable housing for subsequent low-income families; and are a sustainable path to homeownership – these programs tend to have low rates of foreclosures.

A second option is the creation of a community land trust (CLT)—a private non-profit organization that buys and holds land permanently, thereby preventing increases in the market value of the land that comes with gentrification. CLTs build and sell affordable homes to income eligible families. The housing remains affordable because the CLT separates the cost of the land from the cost of the housing, preserving affordability for subsequent families. Washington State has twenty community land trusts operating. The White Center CDA has worked with the Homestead Community Land Trust to promote its program and connect families with homes available in development strategy. Innovative use of TIF programs can also provide a funding mechanism for communities under threat of gentrification, to implement policies that protect against displacement, for businesses and residents (more below).

**Housing**

One important affordable housing program in place is the White Center CDA and Habitat for Humanity owner-occupied housing repair program.

Advocate for quality low-income housing stock. Even though White Center has experienced some gentrification in the past decade, it has also experienced an increase in poverty and non-White populations. This can partially be explained by its relative affordability compared to Seattle, which makes it attractive to low- and moderate-income residents. Poverty increased 4.7% from 2000 to 2009 to 19.5% in White Center, compared to a 1.7% increase in Seattle. Therefore, White Center should continue efforts to build high-quality low-income housing in White Center that ensures that the basic needs of the residents are met while providing economic and social opportunities. Efforts to ensure affordable housing could include down payment assistance, home ownership classes, and continuing SOPI initiatives that provide quality affordable rental units.

Work with the King County Housing Authority to pursue opportunity-based voucher programs. Many stakeholders praised the housing authority for providing higher quality subsidized housing in the neighborhood, and ridding the neighborhood of blight. To be sure, White Center and the CDA should continue to support the housing authority in these much needed investments and improvements. However, the maps showed that all of the subsidized housing (100%) and most of the housing vouchers (97%) in White Center were concentrated in the lowest opportunity tracts, suggesting that White Center should advocate for more affordable housing to be located in higher opportunity areas. One potential strategy could be for the CDA to work with the housing authority to provide voucher holders with
An evaluation of transportation access is needed in White Center to create more informed revitalization efforts.

more information on where higher opportunity areas are located in the region, and connect them with landlords accepting vouchers in those areas (or alternatively, work on recruiting landlords into the program in such areas).

**Evaluate Transit Access.** Noticeably absent from the research was detail on transportation access, and yet it is a crucial element of access to opportunity. The business district analysis in 2003 mentioned poor transit access to the business district and suggested that a public transit center be developed near the WCBD. Several stakeholders also mentioned the transportation challenges facing White Center, including the 2010 temporary closing of the crucial South Park bridge near White Center, now under construction for the next few years; lack of funding for improvements; and long bus commute times or multiple transfers that make errands difficult. All of these challenges limit White Center residents’ access to opportunities in the greater region.

The White Center CDA and partners should undertake an analysis of how people are utilizing different modes of transportation and how affordable and accessible they are. Gaining a greater understanding of transportation usage would complement the work to revitalize White Center. There is a growing transit equity movement in parts of King County that White Center can work with and learn from to better understand and advocate for better access to affordable and convenient transportation options.

**Environment**

between White Center parks as well as connections with the county-wide park system in order to improve access to the parks. Upgraded signage, sidewalks, and parking options would also improve access to White Center parks. The University of Washington’s analysis suggested the addition of a walking loop that ties into the existing walkway on the west side of the 98th Street corridor that would make the space more accessible.

White Center should advocate for siting any potential future parks within the two areas of White Center that the University of Washington found to be under-served. UW also suggested that White Center use vacant lots and odd triangle spaces created by streets that intersect at odd angles (i.e. Delridge Way), to create green space and strong community gathering areas in the WCBD and elsewhere. Through the combination of art, nature, and community involvement, these over-looked spaces could be used in the form of gardens, ethnic gardens or markets, and parks to help reinvent the character of White Center.

**Develop environmentally-friendly infrastructure.** The University of Washington analysis suggested that White Center consider Street Edge Alternatives (SEA), designed to integrate storm water retention with sidewalks and streets. Not only would this help reduce storm water backup, but also would establish rain garden corridors between wetland areas for habitat preservation and connectivity.

**Pursue environmentally-friendly development.** Because of White Center’s older housing and commercial stock, some development will require new buildings. White Center should take the opportunity to develop environmentally-friendly, energy-efficient homes and business space. The White Center CDA and other potential developers should look into the possibility of LEED certification to provide high quality developments for residents and business owners, making White Center an attractive place to live and work.

**Improve access to preventative health care.** The poor health outcomes in White Center suggest the need for better educational programs, preventative treatments, health screenings, and long-term treatment options in the community. Better access to these services, especially for the working poor that do not have health care, should be explored for White Center. Additionally, ensuring services are provided in as many languages as possible will be a constant need in the community.

Recent King County budget challenges and the economic challenges of health agencies supported by government...
funding make this a complex task. Efforts to work with community partners with deep ties to hard to reach communities, especially within the schools, have seen some success, but more creative partnerships are necessary. Given recent improvements in health indicators such as infant mortality and heart-disease related mortality, White Center CDA should be encouraged to continue its efforts as a regional health intermediary and to continue to implement health strategies to improve the social conditions in White Center that impact health.

**Continue and expand healthy food education and access.** White Center already has healthy food initiatives in place, but economic and cultural barriers make healthy eating initiatives more difficult in White Center. Key populations which require improved access to healthy food are seniors, youth, and families that have a language barrier or income constraints. One unique way healthy food can be accessed in White Center is for the community to provide supports for existing food markets that specialize in different ethnic foods, ensuring that there are affordable, healthy options included.

Another effort that could be developed further is community gardens. Gardens can be a great learning experience in healthy eating for young residents as well as a positive utilization of vacant space. White Center already has some gardens, including one in White Center Heights Park, but could explore other areas that are accessible and visible to residents, such as vacant space near the WCBD, for future gardens. These efforts will be most successful if partnerships of community organizations such as schools and community groups join together for garden initiatives.

**Expand options for physical activity in White Center.** Obesity and diabetes continue to plague White Center residents. Open space and parks are not connected and, in some cases, not visible or accessible to residents. Connectivity and way-finding could increase park usage; furthermore, White Center should invest in connectivity that includes not only parks and open space, but also the business district and other key thoroughfares. Making exercise a priority in schools and connecting youth to existing athletic and recreation programs can instill the importance of exercise early on. White Center parks have athletic programming for youth and provide walking trails. Mixed-income projects, such as Greenbridge, and schools have existing fitness initiatives.

**Continue efforts to improve educational outcomes through academic interventions.** White Center has made many important improvements in educational outcomes, but much more is needed for students to succeed. The White Center Neighborhood Action Plan envisions a cradle-to-career pipeline to increase academic and professional success of White Center youth. Strong and widely available early childhood education, math and literacy interventions, and better support systems at the local community colleges are important to a successful cradle-to-career pipeline. However, educational interventions must be partnered with other revitalization initiatives in White Center due to the large effect that poverty and language have on educational outcomes. Poverty reduction initiatives and special attention and support for English Language Learners, who have lower achievement levels than the overall student population, are vital to the initiative’s success at developing successful students. White Center Promise has and can continue to advocate for this approach which also highlights collaboration, a strong focus on transitional years (pre-K and middle school), and active parent engagement/leadership.

**Leverage the increasing focus on race, equity and social justice initiatives with government partners.**

**Education**

Given White Center’s low socioeconomic status and great racial and ethnic diversity, it’s worthwhile to highlight recent race and equity commitments made by local governments such as the City of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice initiative, King County’s Equity and Social Justice initiative, and Highline Public Schools equity policy. To date, these have been largely internal reorganization efforts. However, there are plans to begin external work with communities around these issues. For example, in 2010, one of the City of Seattle’s goals was “to work externally with community members, organizations, businesses, and public and private institutions to develop a shared vision and a collaborative action plan to achieve greater racial equity.” White Center would be a good pilot project for the development of such a plan.

The White Center Opportunity Analysis depicts a neighborhood in transition. Despite its many challenges...
VI. Conclusion

in the form of socioeconomic disparity, challenges to educational outcomes, and a lack of local government support, the neighborhood contains unique assets such as diversity, location, and community action that have the potential to help change the outcomes in the area. While many of the concrete gains of the past have been lost since the beginning of the recession, some gains, such as in financial literacy, business development, healthy eating programs, a new school, affordable housing initiatives, and renovated parks, have been sustained.

Furthermore, White Center has many strengths to capitalize on these resources, including community engagement, committed community organizations, and social networks that have the potential to create bonds between White Center’s diverse groups which could, in turn, help strengthen the neighborhood as a whole.

Amidst the changes and struggles that White Center faces, the community must continue their dedicated revitalization efforts. Equitable neighborhood revitalization is a complex, dynamic and long-term challenge. Successfully intervening to bring positive and transformative change will continue to require a long-term commitment, broad and deep collaboration, meaningful community engagement, a multi-faceted approach, and the ability to leverage initiatives with public and private dollars. Aided by thorough analysis, policy recommendations, strategies, and a renewed sense of community, the people of White Center can use their combined assets to overcome their challenges and position themselves for a bright future.

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### VII. Appendices

#### A. Opportunity Mapping Indicator List

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B. White Center Community Engagement Interview Questionnaire

Interview Questions: White Center Opportunity Community Scan

1. Thank you for agreeing to share your insights and expertise with us during this interview. Have you had a chance to review the letter describing the study? Do you have any questions?

For the purpose of this study we use the term revitalization to describe the place-based or community-based strategies in a neighborhood which contribute to its social, physical, environmental, economic and fiscal health and development. Revitalization activities could include housing stabilization or development, economic development, asset building for residents, civic engagement, transportation and mobility improvements for residents, community health interventions, or infrastructure improvements.

Please try to be as specific and detailed as possible in your answers, this will really help us identify concrete ideas and policies to help the White Center Community Development Association. Thank you again for your time and contribution to this study. Are you ready to begin?

2. What are the opportunities for revitalization in the White Center community? What are the community’s primary assets (for example, community assets, economic assets, social assets or geographic assets) which will encourage revitalization? Please be as specific as possible in your reply.

3. What strategies, policies, or investments are needed to successfully capitalize on these opportunities to foster revitalization?

4. What are some impediments to opportunity or challenges in the community which will be a barrier to revitalization?

5. What strategies, policies or investments are needed to successfully address these challenges?

6. Are there recent trends or other factors in the Puget Sound region, economy, or throughout the broader community or the neighborhood which will impact the community’s revitalization?

7. Can you identify any specific city, regional or state policies or programs which are assisting in expanding opportunity in the neighborhood and fostering revitalization? Can you identify policies or programs at the city, regional or state level which may not exist at this time, but could be beneficial for expanding opportunity and fostering revitalization?

8. Can you identify any specific city, regional or state policies which impede opportunities for revitalization in the community?

9. How “engaged” are community members in the community’s revitalization? (On a scale of 1 (not engaged) to 5 (very engaged)).

10. How are community members engaged? (open answer at first, then read through list of options...asking if community members are engaging through the following activities)
   a. Participation on a neighborhood committee
   b. Volunteer experience (one time or reoccurring?)
   c. Donation of time or resources to non-profits serving the community
   d. Activities with youth
   e. Engagement and activity through a faith-based institution
   f. Engagement and activity through an educational institution
   g. Other neighborhood groups or associations (business/civic)

11. Are there any specific barriers to community engagement you can identify?

12. In what ways would you recommend expanding and improving civic engagement in the community?

13. Are there local or grass roots capacities or assets that are underutilized in the neighborhood which would be helpful in expanding opportunities and civic engagement in the community? Please try to be as specific and detailed as possible in your answers.

14. Are there additional comments or observations that you would like to add?

15. Are there other people you recommend that we speak with?

16. Would you like to see the results of this study when it is completed?
Interview Questions: White Center Opportunity Community Scan (revised)

1. Thank you for agreeing to share your insights and expertise with us during this interview. Have you had a chance to review the letter describing the study? Do you have any questions?

For the purpose of this study we use the term revitalization to describe the place based or community based strategies in a neighborhood which contribute to its social, physical, environmental, economic and fiscal health and development. Revitalization activities could include housing development and preserving affordable housing, opportunities for new businesses, job training, opportunities to participate in decisions affecting the community, community health interventions, and infrastructure improvements.

I would also re-work the definition of 'revitalization' slightly. So instead of "housing stabilization" something like preserving housing affordability; instead of 'economic development' something like 'opportunities to open small business; opportunities for job training'; instead of "asset building" something like 'opportunities to participate in decisions affecting the community'... etc. and instead of "transportation and mobility", 'improved access to transportation and transportation options-- improved service/routes, etc.' Please try to be as specific and detailed as possible in your answers, this will really help us identify concrete ideas and policies to help the White Center Community Development Association. Thank you again for your time and contribution to this study. Are you ready to begin?

2. What are White Center’s assets? What do you like best about your community?

3. What investments are needed to develop or improve these assets?

4. What are the challenges that White Center faces?

5. What strategies are needed to address these challenges?

6. Are there recent trends in the region that will impact White Center’s revitalization?

7. What city, regional or state programs help White Center residents and help improve the community? Do you have ideas for programs that do not exist at this time, but would help White Center?

8. How “engaged” are community members in the community’s revitalization? (On a scale of 1 (not engaged) to 5 (very engaged)). By engaged, I mean do residents have the opportunity to give their opinions on new projects or programs planned for WC? Are residents' ideas and suggestions included in new developments/programs?

9. How are community members engaged?
   a. Participation on a neighborhood committee
   b. Volunteer experience (one time or reoccurring?)
   c. Donation of time or resources to non-profits serving the community
   d. Activities with youth
   e. Engagement and activity through a faith based institution
   f. Engagement and activity through an educational institution
   g. Other neighborhood groups or associations (business/civic)

10. Are there barriers to community engagement in White Center?

11. In what ways would you recommend improving civic engagement in the community?

12. Are there additional comments or observations that you would like to add?

13. Are there other people you recommend that we speak with?

14. Would you like to see the results of this study when it is completed?