

Little Saigon 2020 Action Plan: Years 1 & 2

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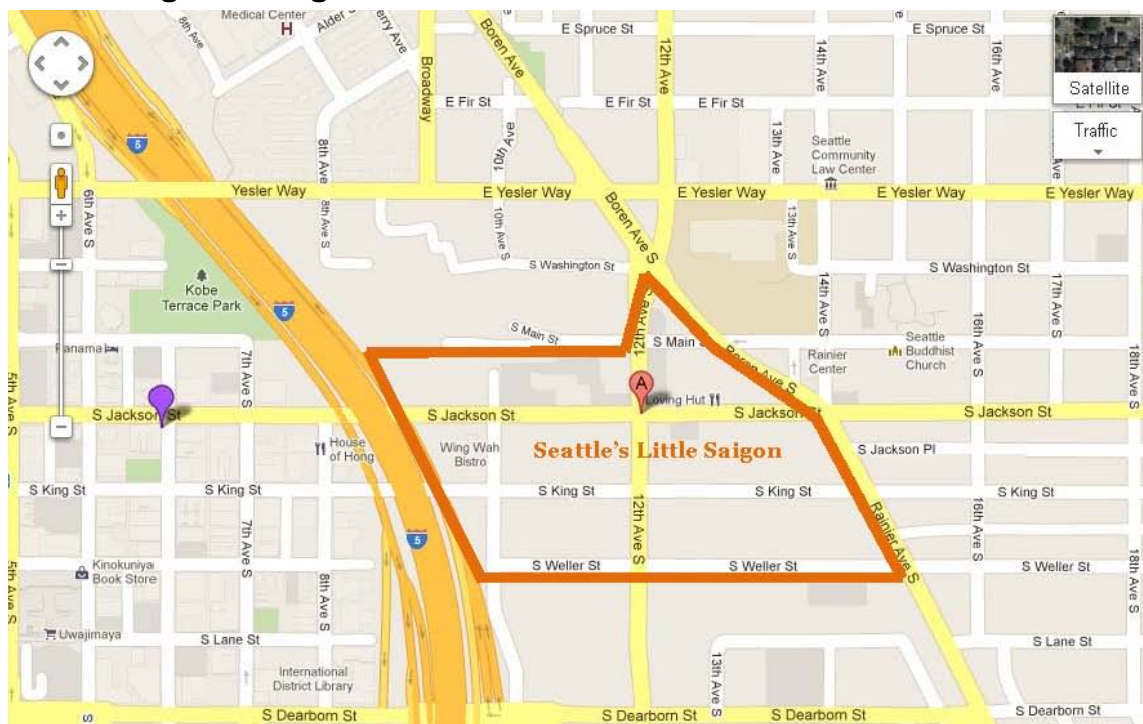
1.0 Executive Summary

Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood faces strong displacement forces due to its proximity to Downtown, a regional transportation hub, and recent major land-use changes allowing for significant density increase. The neighborhood is a social, cultural, and economic hub for the Vietnamese community in the Great Seattle Area. However, there are major internal community challenges preventing effective response to external displacement forces. Those internal challenges include lack of a community-based institution capable of advocating, engaging, and taking action on the community's behalf.

The Little Saigon 2020 Action Plan is a road map that will help guide the community capacity building process while also addressing external displacement factors. Using a project-based approach, it aims to rally the community around tangible projects with strong community support. Key elements of the plan's overall strategy are:

- Build civic momentum starting with a core group of passionate community stakeholders
- Focus that civic passion on a visionary project that aligns with community needs
- Develop a trusted and sustainable organization designed to harness community involvement for the improvement of Little Saigon
- Maximize collaboration and partnerships to leverage limited resources

2.0 Little Saigon Background & Context



Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood is located in the International District just east of Chinatown. This neighborhood is primarily a small business district with approximately 125 businesses, most of which are mom-and-pop restaurants, markets, hair salons, delis, and other food/retail/service sector businesses. About 65-70% of the businesses are owned by Vietnamese who came to the area as refugees beginning in 1975. The neighborhood has a little over 100 residential units, about half of which are market-rate condos and the other half, low-income rental units.

The area between I-5 and Rainier Ave comprised mostly of vacant buildings during the 70's. It became known as "Little Saigon" in the early 80's when mom-and-pop shops began sprouting up around the intersection of 12th and Jackson as the Vietnamese refugees settled into their newly adopted country.

Currently, Little Saigon is a vibrant and vital social, cultural, and economic hub for the Vietnamese community in the Puget Sound area. There are approximately 55,000 people of Vietnamese-decent living in King County according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

2.1 External Challenges Facing the Little Saigon Community

Little Saigon's proximity to Downtown Seattle coupled with being a low-rise area makes it an especially attractive neighborhood for development. Adding fuel to the fire is the future First Hill Streetcar and recent major land-use changes of the South Downtown area as well as of SHA's 30-acre Yesler Terrace property. Little Saigon is facing economic forces that would likely uproot and displace this community if nothing is done.

2.2 Internal Community Challenges

These major changes to the area will unleash economic forces on a community that does not have any civic institutions capable of advocating, engaging, and taking action on the community's behalf. Business owners are pinned to their shops and restaurants in a constant battle to stay afloat. They are saddled with thin profit margins, fierce competition, rising costs, and sluggish demand due to a weak economy.

Associations and organizations in the Vietnamese community lack the capacity to address issues beyond the bounds of their programs. The religious institutions are fiercely independent and generally don't involve themselves in neighborhood matters. The broader Vietnamese community is fragmented and has a weak tradition of community collaboration and partnership.

3.0 Community Engagement Strategy 2012

Given the internal and external challenges, IDEA Space staff in partnership with Friends of Little Saigon (FLS), developed a Community Engagement Plan which incorporated the following elements:

- Educate stakeholders on issues impacting Little Saigon and broader Vietnamese community
- Assess community stakeholders' vision for Little Saigon
- Recruit a core group of passionate stakeholders to prioritize and advocate for a common vision
- Develop community stakeholders' capacity to advocate and engage in civic process
- Meet with elected officials and other decision-makers to advocate for specific deliverables

3.1 Actions: Intensive Community Engagement

The Community Engagement Plan was implemented between December of 2011 and September of 2012. It included the following major meetings and events:

- 2 large community gatherings to educate stakeholders on Little Saigon issues and to solicit feedback on how they would improve the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Little Saigon
- 4 Friends of Little Saigon “core group” meeting where feedback from the community gatherings were discussed and prioritized
- Monthly meetings of FLS members to discuss civic engagement strategies and tactics
- 9 meetings with Seattle Councilmembers to discuss community issues and vision
- 2 City Council public hearings on Yesler Terrace rezoning where over 40 stakeholders attended

Through this engagement process, Friends of Little Saigon and IDEA Space were able to generate strong civic momentum which in turn strengthened FLS’s position as a credible entity for the community to rally around.

4.0 Assessing Community Vision for Little Saigon

Based on stakeholder feedback from two large community gatherings and four smaller “core group” meetings to prioritize the feedbacks, the following recommendations were elevated as action items:

CULTURAL

- Build Vietnamese Cultural Center
- Develop Little Saigon into center for Vietnamese-American arts, history and culture
- Preserve the stories and history of the Vietnamese refugee experience
- Share Vietnamese culture with broader community through regular events

SOCIAL

- Build affordable family and senior housing
- Increase community-based organizational capacity
- Advocate for medium-rise density to preserve neighborhood feel
- Advocate for more direct transit connections with major Vietnamese-American population centers
- Develop open space and parks

ECONOMIC

- Build affordable commercial space
- Business assistance and access to financing
- Develop centralized parking structure
- Create more opportunities for micro-enterprises
- Limit building heights to 65’ commercial/85’ residential

4.1 Key Action Items Forged into Little Saigon Landmark Vision

The Little Saigon Landmark project is a direct outgrowth of the elevated action items from the community visioning process. This project encapsulates many of the main recommendations into a single tangible mixed-use development that can more effectively focus limited community resources. The Little Saigon Landmark development aims to be the social, cultural, and economic hub of the Vietnamese-American community in the Greater Seattle Area.

The concept solidified into its current form as IDEA Space staff connected the dots between community priorities and key stakeholders with resources who are aligned with these priorities. The proposal has three main components:

- Vietnamese Cultural Center
- Destination Cultural Retail/Commercial
- Affordable Housing

The **Vietnamese Cultural Center** will be a multifunctional social and cultural gathering place. At approximately 10,000 to 15,000 square feet, the Center will include a large gathering/performance hall, exhibition space, office space for community nonprofits, and classrooms.

The **commercial/retail space** will be the largest component of the development at approximately 40,000 to 50,000 square feet. The centerpiece will be the *Emerald Market*, a 20,000 square foot indoor Southeast Asian-style market housing kiosk and booth vendors. The market will be activated by approximately 35 to 50 vendors offering a range of culinary as well as retail products. Also incorporated into the commercial/retail component will be:

- Banquet-size restaurant capable of seating 400-500 people
- Asian supermarket
- Bar/lounge
- Asian bakery

The Little Saigon Landmark development intends to be a cultural and retail destination for the Vietnamese-American community as well as all Seattleites who enjoy a great cultural experience.

Affordable housing will also be an integral part of this development at 75+ units with many 2 and 3-bedroom units catering to families.

5.0 Key Accomplishments in 2012

- Elevated Friends of Little Saigon as a credible and effective advocate for Little Saigon
- Friends of Little Saigon was successful in winning the unanimous approval for City Council Resolution #31403 calling for City support for the Little Saigon Landmark project
- Through community organizing and engagement, FLS successfully persuade the City to allocate \$40,000 to go toward LS Landmark feasibility study
- Through FLS advocacy efforts, SHA agreed to participate in the feasibility study and was able to leveraged a \$100,000 grant from JP Morgan Chase Foundation for this purpose

6.0 Strategy for 2013

In order to build on the accomplishments of 2012, our strategy for 2013 must adjust to address the growing complexities as well as the growing opportunities of this project. The following strategy will guide actions taken in 2013:

- Strengthen Friends of Little Saigon's organizational infrastructure
- Continue to develop FLS into a trusted and sustainable organization designed to harness community involvement for the improvement of Little Saigon
- Continue to engage and build community through the Little Saigon Landmark project
- Maximize collaboration opportunities and partnerships to leverage limited resources

6.1 Actions: Strengthen Friends of Little Saigon

As the Little Saigon Landmark project gains momentum and becomes more complex, it becomes even more crucial that the community, through FLS, be firmly in the driver's seat of this process. IDEA Space staff have lined up consultant resources to support this strategy. The main actions are:

- Institute clearly defined board roles and responsibilities, by-laws, organizational and board structure
- Target and recruit passionate and qualified community stakeholders for FLS membership and board
- Implement board training to ensure effective board governance
- Develop a strategic plan that addresses long term FLS sustainability and relevancy issues
- Develop and submit application to IRS for 501(c)(3) status

6.2 Actions: Continue to Engage and Build Community

Capitalize on the visibility and credibility garnered through advocacy efforts during 2012 by expanding FLS's reach in the community and developing opportunities for more community engagement. Main actions:

- Create and implement communications plan for FLS
- Develop multiple touch points for community stakeholder to engage in Landmark project and other Little Saigon improvement projects
- Continue to solicit community feedback on Action Items

6.3 Actions: Maximize Collaboration and Partnerships

Target and reach out to potential resource partners with aligning interests. Main actions:

- Define and clarify roles and responsibilities between all key stakeholders for the Little Saigon Landmark feasibility study
- Continue to build bridges to groups/organizations in the Vietnamese community as well as groups/organizations outside the Vietnamese community
- Partner with Seattle Department of Planning for Little Saigon Neighborhood Planning process
- Continue to reach out and engage with local, state, and federal decision-makers
- Partner with resource providers such as Seattle University and University of Washington on community capacity building projects

7.0 Goals for 2014 and Beyond

The Little Saigon 2020 Action Plan will evolve as social, cultural, economic, and political factors shape the civic landscape over time. However, the overarching goals of **community capacity building**, **civic engagement**, and **neighborhood cultural preservation improvement** should remain fairly constant.

Projected goals for 2014:

- Assemble financing package for the Little Saigon Landmark development
- Develop business technical assistance support structure for landmark retail tenants
- Continue expanding community involvement and membership to FLS
- Leverage community involvement to other Little Saigon improvement projects
- Add staff capacity for Friends of Little Saigon

8.0 Key Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders in this process but the main one is Friends of Little Saigon. Formed about two years ago by community members who wanted to work together to improve the neighborhood and preserve its unique cultural flavor. Members are made up of small business owners, community activists, and professionals who share a love for Little Saigon and its symbolic meaning to the Vietnamese community. Other organizations and entities directly involved in this project are:

Organization	Role(s)	Key Individual(s)
Friends of Little Saigon	Initiator, community activist & advocate	Tam Nguyen, Theresa Reyna, My Linh Ngo, Yen Lam, Thach Nguyen
Emerald Market Partners	Commercial/retail investors	Tam Nguyen, Yen Lam, Thach Nguyen
SCIDpda/IDEA Space	Consultant, project management, fiscal agent for FLS	Maiko Winkler-Chin, Paul Mar, Quang H. Nguyen, Quynh Pham
Seattle City Council	Project supporter	CM O'Brien and CM Licata
Seattle Office of Economic Development	Lead City agency for feasibility study	TBD
Seattle Housing Authority	Potential landlord and partner	Andrew Lofton, Al Levine, Anne Fiske-Zuniga

9.0 Key Resources

Effective leveraging of resources from key partners aligned with the aims of the plan is crucial to its success. As this process evolves, FLS and the Little Saigon community will actively reach out to other resource partners to ensure that critical actions have the means to be implemented. The following are current resource partners:

Partner	Resource(s)	Task(s)	Implementation Timeframe
Friends of Little Saigon	Community volunteers	Community building	Jan 2009 – Future
SCIDpda, IDEA Space	Staff	Feasibility study, community building	Jan 2008 – Future
JP Morgan Chase Foundation	Funding	Supports community capacity building	Jan 2012 – Dec 2013
PSRC/Growing Transit Communities	Funding, peer support group	Supports community engagement process	Nov 2011 – Dec 2013
City of Seattle OED	Funding	Supports feasibility study	Jan 2013 – Dec 2013
City of Seattle DPD/DON/SDOT	Staff	Neighborhood planning	Starts Spring 2013
Seattle Housing Authority	Staff, funding (from JP Morgan)	Feasibility study	Jan 2013 – Dec 2013
Seattle University	Staff, PhD candidates	Research, consulting on org development	Nov 2012 – June 2013