

Transformation Plan Outline



UNION SQUARE

A CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD

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9/11/2024



TO: Katherine Carter, Nathan Mishler, HUD Choice Neighborhood
FROM: Shenae Draughn, Executive Vice President
DATE: September 11, 2024
Re: Transformation Plan Outline

I. Executive Summary

- **Draft Vision:** Union Square is a calm and safe place where residents can feel secure and connected within the City.
- **Draft Goals:** What do we want the community to be like post transformation?
 - **Welcoming:** Union Square will be a community that embraces its diversity and encourages its residents from cradle to career and beyond.
 - **Safe and Healthy:** Union Square will provide a safe and healthy environment, supporting the physical and mental well-being of everyone.
 - **Inclusive and Engaged:** Union Square will be a community where diversity thrives, and all residents are actively engaged and connected.
 - **Peaceful:** This will be a tranquil haven, offering residents a peaceful and secure environment within the City.
 - **Home:** Union Square will offer clean, stable, and affordable housing, ensuring that all residents have access to quality living conditions.

Summary of Neighborhood, Housing and People - the elements of the plan

- **Neighborhood:** The Union Square area will be a thriving community that fosters **economic opportunity** and **social cohesion**, with **beautiful public spaces** that bring people together; **stable, affordable housing**; opportunities to **learn, grow, and stay healthy**; and safe, easy **connections to the city and region**.
- **Housing:** A thriving and supportive community where quality affordable and mixed-income housing is a foundation for security and growth for a diverse and vibrant community.
- **People:** To create a thriving Union Square and Hill community with quality education, ample employment opportunities, and excellent health care for all.

Early Action Activities (EAA) undertaken during the planning process

- **Without HUD Funds:** Gazebo and benches for the backyard of Robert T. Wolfe (Wolfe) apartments.
- **With HUD Funds:** EAA Committee has decided to focus on Trowbridge Square Park for early action:
 1. Regrading and rebuilding Trowbridge Square park's stone dust path;

2. Installing a pendulum swing with a safety zone to support various communal swinging activities;
 3. Placing pole banners that honor the community's historical context and connection to the Underground Railroad; Installing an interpretive display or monument that highlights the historical significance of the Trowbridge Square area in New Haven's history;
 4. Installing an interpretive display or monument that highlights the historical significance of the Trowbridge Square area in New Haven's history;
 5. Completing the Part 58 environmental assessment
- **Implementation:** TBD

II. Introduction

- Snapshots of meaningful community engagement and involvement of the Union Square community in every aspect of the planning process.
- The Union Square Choice Neighborhood Planning Handbook details a comprehensive community engagement plan. Elm City Communities (ECC) and The Glendower Group (Glendower), together with Target Project residents, established the Union Square Transformation Committee. This committee includes a Steering Committee, three task forces (Housing, People, Neighborhood), a Resident Advisory Committee, and an Early Action Committee. These groups will tackle issues such as education, health, safety, recreation, and economic development, developing and refining strategies to meet neighborhood needs.

The Steering Committee will prioritize these needs and forward them to the Project Manager, who will coordinate with Task Force Leads to prepare the Transformation Plan. The draft plan will undergo review with experts developing financing strategies. The Steering Committee will review the final plan before it moves to implementation.

- **Robert T. Wolfe Resident Advisory Council:** An elected group of residents that will represent the site in policy decisions and other matters sent to the ECC administration, as well as organize community events and activities. This committee will also review task force findings and recommendations to ensure that strategies and actions align with residents' needs and opportunities, and to identify and address any gaps in the Plan.
- **Task Forces: People, Housing, and Neighborhood:** Three task forces guide the development of the core elements of the Notice to Proceed (NTP). They meet monthly and include Wolfe residents, neighborhood residents, local agency members, service providers, business owners, non-profit organizations, and community leaders. These task forces focus on identifying, developing, and implementing services and programs in response to the

needs and interests of the Union Square community. Each task force has selected co-leads, including four residents from Wolfe.

- **Early Action Committee:** HUD requires grantees to complete specific Early Action Activities within the two-year planning grant period to demonstrate progress toward neighborhood transformation. The committee defines the scopes of these activities, focusing on those with the greatest potential for positive impact on the neighborhood. This committee includes Wolfe residents, community partners, Hill residents, and Hill management teams.
- **Steering Committee:** The Steering Committee will lead the development of a visionary yet practical plan for revitalizing the Union Square community. It will oversee the overall strategy, integrating forward-thinking goals with achievable steps. The committee will gather input from the task forces and other committees, evaluate their progress and recommendations, and offer strategic guidance to ensure alignment with the community's needs and objectives.
- **Key Stakeholders:** The New Haven Housing Authority, Robert T. Wolfe residents, City of New Haven, Hill and Hill South Community Management Team, local businesses, Yale-New Haven Hospital, Union Square Neighborhood residents, and local institutions—including faith-based organizations, educational institutions, housing providers, and community service organizations such as Cornell Scott Hill Health Center (and many others).

Highlight ECC's Commitments

- Residents will not be permanently displaced.
- Residents may be relocated temporarily, depending upon the redevelopment plans.
- Residents will be offered a choice of housing.
- All residents in good standing, including mixed families, will have the right to return.
- Residents will continue to have tenant protection provisions in the new leases.

Summary of Choice Neighborhoods Planning including community engagement

- Five to six **progressive community workshops** to inform plan development – all featured small group discussions in two different languages (English & Spanish). ASL services also included.
 - **Workshop #1 (November 2023)** – Kick-off Meeting. Understanding the planning process.
 - **Workshop #2 (May 29, 2024)** – Learning the Lingo. An introduction to the planning process and understanding density.
 - **Workshop #3** – Community Visioning
 - **Workshop #4 (June 20, 2024)** - Listening Session

- **Workshop #5 (July 29, 2024)** – Understanding the Resident Assessment results
- **Community Room and Backyard briefings** planned at strategic points in the planning process that take the planning process to where residents live – helping to increase the number of voices heard.
- **Parallel process** for HUD early action activities – gathering residents’ input and making selections.
- **Wolfe residents’ voices given priority** throughout the process, residents will engage in intentional capacity building to foster meaningful engagement.
- **Planning timeline** with key milestones and activities.
- **Overview of the key goal areas** in the plan
- Overview of the **Union Square/Hill** target neighborhood
 - History of the community
 - Changes on the horizon
 - Community concerns grounded in historical and current events

III. Robert T. Wolfe Today

- **Highlights of specific efforts** to learn about the Wolfe community.
 - **Wolfe Residents’ Surveys** – survey residents plus door-to-door efforts by designated floor captains.
 - **Site Tour of Robert T. Wolfe** – on foot with Community Partners
 - **Walking Tour** of Trowbridge Square Park and Surrounding neighborhood – on foot with Alders
 - **Neighborhood Tour** – on foot and by bus with Wolfe residents and Master Planner, and City partners.
- Informed by:
 - **Robert T. Wolfe and Church Street South (CSS) resident survey.** (May – July 2024)
 - **Neighborhood Tour** – (March 2024) with residents and City partners.
 - **Primary and secondary data collection** including windshield survey of neighborhood conditions, ECC administrative resident data, U.S. Census Bureau, DataHaven, Center for Disease Control, New Haven Police Department, etc.
- **Summary of Key Takeaways**
 - **Community Context**
 - The emergency housing crisis and historical displacement of low-income communities in New Haven have elevated concerns and fears among

residents about the impacts of new development, whether residential or commercial.

- New Haven's downtown is undergoing significant redevelopment, driven by both public and private investments. This transformation is expected to accelerate as new projects, such as the recent plans for mixed-use developments and infrastructure improvements, come to fruition.
 - Rising property values and new development projects are raising concerns about affordability and displacement among low-income residents. The city's efforts to address these issues include initiatives for affordable housing and community support programs.
 - New Haven is focusing on sustainability and environmental improvements, such as green space expansion and energy-efficient building practices. These initiatives are expected to influence future development patterns and quality of life in the city.
- **Resident Characteristics**
 - With 33% of residents living below the poverty line, Union Square has a significantly higher poverty rate than other parts of New Haven.
 - Union Square residents have lower educational attainment than city and county averages. While 76% have a high school diploma or equivalent, only 13% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Among Robert T. Wolfe residents, only 30% have a high school diploma or GED, and 13% completed 8th grade or less.
 - Unemployment is a major issue, with 10% of residents actively seeking work but unable to find it. Additionally, 11.1% of households have no working residents, and a lower percentage of households have two working adults compared to the city and county.
 - Low car ownership, coupled with other factors like childcare costs, makes it harder for residents to find and maintain employment.
 - **Economic and Employment**
 - Only 5.7% of Robert T. Wolfe residents are currently employed, reflecting a very low workforce participation rate.
 - The average annual earned household income for Robert T. Wolfe residents is \$17,208, much lower than city and county averages.
 - 10% of Robert T. Wolfe residents are actively seeking work but unable to find it, underscoring the high unemployment rate in the community.
 - **Health**
 - Life expectancy in Union Square is 75.9, while the state average is 80.1.

- The Union Square neighborhood faces challenges in accessing healthcare services. While the presence of Yale New Haven Hospital provides nearby resources, many residents lack adequate insurance or face barriers such as transportation and cost, limiting their ability to seek timely medical care.
- Residents in Union Square experience higher rates of chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and hypertension compared to other parts of New Haven. These conditions are often linked to environmental factors, limited access to preventive care, and lower-income levels.
- Many residents in Union Square face food insecurity, with limited access to affordable, healthy food options. This contributes to poor nutrition and higher rates of obesity and related health issues, such as diabetes.
- Access to Healthcare: The 2019 Data Haven Community Index report found that 7% of Black adults and 12% of Latinx adults in Greater New Haven with incomes under \$30,000 lacked health insurance, compared to 4% of White adults. By 2021, the Data Haven Equity report showed that only 22% of Latinx adults had health insurance.
- Health Risks: According to the 2023 Data Haven Community Index, obesity and smoking are the biggest health risks in Greater New Haven, particularly among Black, Latinx, and low-income adults. The 2023 Data Haven Equity report highlighted elevated rates of chronic diseases—such as asthma, diabetes, and hypertension—among Latinx and Black populations. Union Square, in comparison to neighborhoods like East Rock and Wooster Square, showed a higher incidence of high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, asthma, and diabetes.

○ **Housing**

The key findings of the Neighborhood Assessment and Resident Assessment for the Union Square community that were completed by the Yale Urban Design Workshop and the Yale School of Management, respectively are:

- The majority of housing in Union Square is multi-family, with 75% of units built before 1970. About 20% of homes are considered substandard and in need of significant repairs.
- Homeownership vs. Rental: Homeownership in Union Square stands at 29%, well below the county average of 62%, indicating a predominantly rental-based community.
- 44% of renters earn less than 30% of the area median income, with a shortage of 900 affordable housing units for these families.
- As of 2020, Union Square had 1,034 vacant units, making up 17% of the total housing supply. Over half of these (55%) are categorized as “other

vacant” by the census, meaning they are long-term vacant and uninhabitable without major repairs, reflecting significant housing instability in the neighborhood.

○ **Crime**

- Between 2020 and 2023, New Haven experienced 76 fatal shootings, primarily concentrated in Fair Haven, Newhallville, and the Hill. Of these, 14 occurred in Union Square, with 9 south of Columbus Avenue, including 7 in the Kimberly Square area.
- Residents are worried about gang activity, drug trafficking, and inadequate street lighting, which contribute to heightened feelings of insecurity.

○ **Transportation & Connectivity**

- About 45% of Robert T. Wolfe residents depend on public transportation for their daily commute, highlighting reliance on bus services for connectivity across the city.
- The Resident Assessment shows that 40% of residents have access to a car, but 45% of these residents reported staying home in the past year due to unreliable transportation.
- Union Square has a Walk Score of 70, indicating it is somewhat walkable. However, pedestrian safety is a concern due to challenging street crossings, limited connectivity between sub-areas, and changes in topography.

○ **Environmental Factors**

- Union Square has several parks, including Trowbridge Park, Columbus Avenue Park, Roberto Clemente Park, Cedar Hill Playground, and Kimberly Field. However, only about 5% of the land area is dedicated to parks and recreational spaces.
- Residents report air pollution issues, especially near major roadways, and experience periodic flooding in low-lying areas.

○ **Quality of Life**

- The neighborhood currently lacks amenities that support residents' daily needs. While new mixed-use developments with retail spaces are planned for the future, there is concern about whether these will be affordable for lower-income residents.
 - There are limited full-service grocery stores in the neighborhood.
 - The closest full-service grocery store is about 1-2 miles away.
 - The majority of these stores require transportation.
- On-site services include: Our Community Economic Development department provides a range of programs, including GED preparation, computer literacy, and financial management. However, challenges

include limited programming space and insufficient funding. Residents have also expressed interest in programs for addiction services.

- **Civic Engagement**
 - Robert T. Wolfe residents generally feel connected to their neighbors and engaged in local activities. While most are not involved with community organizations such as the Wolfe RAC or the Neighborhood Council, a few residents are active in local government. Additionally, they have demonstrated notable participation in neighborhood events, with over 30 residents attending each of the first two Resident Meetings for the Transformation Plan.

IV. Union Square Tomorrow – People, Neighborhood, and Housing: Goals and Strategies

Highlights of specific efforts that informed the Union Square of tomorrow:

- Resident bus tours to other housing communities in the region to see different styles of buildings, finishes, densities and amenities
- Community Workshop #1 Vision “Historical banners”
- Resident Focused Discussions on Services
- Business Roundtable with Kymberly Square Business Owners

Highlight of potential focus areas for the Union Square Transformation Plan that are under development:

- **People Focus:** Focus on overall resident wellbeing
 - **Elderly and persons with disabilities:**
 - Service delivery in multiple languages
 - Classes on technology use, particularly use of cell phones, tablets, and laptop/desktop computers, and internet safety
 - Social activities to address isolation and loneliness
 - Expansion of on-site services and programming to work with these populations
 - **Family with Children:**
 - Participation in early childhood programs
 - Career exploration and post-secondary education preparation and support for transition age youth
 - Special education support – including assessment, advocacy, and access to services

- **Working Age and Work Able Adults:**
 - GED/High school diploma programs
 - English as a Second Language classes
 - Computer literacy programs
 - Workforce development and training
 - Section 3 residents that include both vocational and non-vocational training programs
- **Health and Wellness**
 - Expand access to quality low-cost fruits and vegetables
 - Expand access to mental health services
 - Supports to address and treat chronic health conditions
 - Health care coordinators to assist with navigating health insurance, managing health costs, and overcoming cultural barriers
 - Walkability and bike ability
- **Resident-wide**
 - Access to safe and affordable banking products
 - Access to credit monitoring and credit building tools
 - Effective communication and information sharing tools
- **Neighborhood Focus:** fostering social cohesion through attractive public spaces, stable and affordable housing, opportunities for learning and growth, and easy connections to the city, while ensuring residents stay healthy and safe.
 - Growth in community serving businesses affordable to a range of incomes – grocery store, pharmacy, bank, post office, restaurants, cafes, health clinic.
 - Implement commercial corridor improvements to make spaces more inviting to residents.
 - Foster a pedestrian- and bike-friendly community
 - Make sure homeowners can stay in their homes long term.
 - Increase the amount of affordable rental properties for families and seniors, especially on vacant and under-utilized, City-owned land.
 - Invest in parks and public spaces to make them more welcoming, fun, and safe gathering places for the community.
 - Build local resident and nonprofit capacity to organize the community, care for neighborhood spaces, host programs and events, and provide services.

- **Housing Focus:** focus on the transformation of Robert T. Wolfe and former Church Street South site - key principles of that transformation:
 - Build back a replacement unit for all current Robert T. Wolfe households and 183 former Church Street South Units.
 - Parks and open spaces with features and programming for residents to live healthy lifestyles.
 - Housing opportunities across a range of affordability levels, unit sizes, accessible features, private open space
 - Includes units with accessible features for families with minor children and elderly/disabled residents.
 - Incorporate modern amenities into units and buildings including adequate parking, in-unit washer and dryer hookups, building laundry facilities, security, central air conditioning, etc.
 - Density of housing, reflecting need to greatly expand number of housing units in the City, support affordability / mixed income and support amenities.
 - New infrastructure for flood resilience, bike/pedestrian connectivity, and better public transportation access.

V. Overall Master Plan

Highlights of specific efforts to involve Wolfe and former Church Street South (CSS) residents in the planning of the site:

- Community Workshop #2 - Introduction to Density and Lingo
- Community Workshop #3 – Community Amenities
- Community Workshop #4 – Site Plan Options

The housing master plan is currently under development. Site plan considerations include:

- One-for-one replacement of all existing units at Wolfe and Former CSS
- Intent to increase density on-site to accommodate additional affordable housing to address the urgent affordable housing need in New Haven
- Incorporate public, semi-public, semi-private and private open space into the building design and site plan
- Improve walkability and bike ability to promote public health, reduce pollution, and enhance access to healthcare services, while building flood-resilient infrastructure for better emergency response
- Determine what on-site amenities and non-residential uses are desired and financially viable

- Impact of environmental issues and remediation plans on site design and location of structures
- Reach an agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office on historic preservation and impact mitigation.
- Identify new residential developments in the neighborhood that ECC could potentially partner with to incorporate off-site replacement units
- Include sustainable features into the building design and site plan like water recycling, stormwater basins, solar panels, passive heating and cooling, composting, etc.
- Include measures to address floodplain
- Phasing plan including build-first if possible and relocation plan
- All units will be visitable, with at least 5% designed to be accessible for mobility-impaired residents and an additional 2% for households with visual or hearing impairments
- Explore including a senior-only building given current resident demographics

VI. What's Next

TBD

- Implementation structure and partners
- Short, medium, and long-term activities
- Key metrics and measures - baseline and goal

VII. Appendix

- Union Square Planning Handbook
- Union Square Transformation Plan Data Book – forthcoming
- Residential and Commercial Market Study – forthcoming
- Trowbridge Square Park Part 58
- Union Square Transformation Plan - Community Workshop Report Outs
 - Community Workshop #1
 - Community Workshop #2 – forthcoming
 - Community Workshop #3 – forthcoming
 - Community Workshop #4 – forthcoming
 - Community Workshop #5 – forthcoming
 - LEED-ND Checklist – forthcoming