

# HAVE YOU NO SENSE OF DIGNOWITY?

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Dignowity Hill residents recently expressed support for the building of the Bridge Apts next to the historic Hays St. Bridge. The article they wrote in mySA on May 11th characterized the area as “neglected” and “a desirable location for criminal activity”—desperately in need of an influx of new neighbors. The majority of these authors, however, have lived in Dignowity Hill for less than three years. It’s easy to see why the significance of the bridge, the economic ramifications of the project and knowledge of community needs are glossed over.

## History of Development

“Development” projects such as the Bridge Apts. are born out of disinvestment in low income infrastructure and housing. The “neglect” they point to is not the fault of the residents, but rather, a history of redlining and misallocation of city resources.

Low income areas in San Antonio are increasingly being gentrified. Developers build expensive, high-rise apartments that not only displace residents, but also raise the cost of living there making it available only to those with higher incomes.

Take some recent examples. The Soap Factory Apts, now under new ownership, will see rent increases of over \$200 a month. Residents who’ve lived there for decades can no longer afford their rent. Similarly, Mission Trails Mobile Home Park faced displacement when the property was purchased to build a \$75 million luxury apartment complex, a decision which some politicians like Ron Nirenberg now regret supporting.

The Bridge Apts on Cherry and Lamar will not take over an existing building, but they will have a similar economic, housing and emotional toll on current residents. This construction echos San Antonio’s past in destroying and obscuring historic and culturally significant architecture, as they will soon obstruct the view of the historic Hays St. Bridge.

Take the 1955 Univision building, the first Spanish-language broadcasting network in the U.S., that was demolished in favor of a 55 million dollar complex, the Agave Apts that cost from \$1,000-\$3,000 a month. Only a plaque and a single antenna remain of the Univision building, a painful reminder to those who fought for its preservation, and a pitiful legacy of the building’s history and importance to the Latinx community in the U.S.

Other historic buildings have also been sacrificed to make way for “economic activity”. La Gloria, in its vibrant heyday, featured rooftop dances, a food market, and a silent theater. After a long legal fight, district court Judge David Peeples ruled in favor of the building’s current owner, Tony Limón, who wanted

it demolished. Protesters watched as a piece of their history, a part of their lives, was destroyed right in front of them.

## Construction in Dignowity Hill

The Dignowity Hill neighborhood has been experiencing a rapid influx of higher income residents. New reports from the National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders indicate it is one of the most rapidly changing neighborhoods in San Antonio. The construction of the Bridge Apts. would further the pattern of selective development and investment. This complex will not house low-income or working class families or individuals. Projected rents for residents will start around \$1,000, much higher than what low income residents can afford.

Advocates argue space is desperately needed downtown, but between the Agave Apts, Blue Star Lofts, Cadillac Lofts, Can Plant Apts, Candy Lofts, Cevallos Apts, Hemisview Village, Peanut Factory Apts and the Rivera on Broadway, there are over 150 available units in the area.



The historic Univision building (1955), site of the first U.S. Spanish language TV station (KWEX) was displaced by the Agave Apartments on the corner of St. Mary’s St. and Cesar Chavez Blvd.



## Community Needs

Proponents argue that development will beautify the area, bring in new economic activity, and repurpose areas not currently utilized. But it’s essential to understand that this discourse re-codes gentrification in terms of revitalization and obscures the ramifications of such projects.

When families with more disposable income come into the area, so does rapid change in surrounding areas. Property taxes escalate, which pushes long-term, low income residents out of the area, as houses are bought up and flipped for wealthier residents.

This “economic development” is simply code for economic displacement—instead of resolving the root of income inequality and impoverishment, it merely moves it somewhere else.

The type of crime that developers claim are dominating this area, such as homelessness and drug use, are motivated by poverty. If the city is really concerned about homelessness and drug use, then they should reinvest in social safety nets instead of pursuing projects that displace and criminalize impoverished populations.

This type of development isn’t what the community needs—such projects have been attempted in Austin, with numerous families in East Austin pushed out of their communities due to the subsequent rising property taxes due to “development”.

Implementing these projects in low-income spaces not only ignores the needs of families who’ve lived there for generations, but also presents a false image of economic activity. Instead of siding with developers, protection should be prioritized for those who have lived there all along.

