

SCOBEEY COMPLEX DEVELOPMENT MUST PRIORITIZE WESTSIDE RESIDENTS

By Uel Trejo-Rivera, *San Antonio Report*

In April 2017, VIA Metropolitan Transit purchased the Scobey Storage Complex, located at 301 N. Medina St., for \$5.2 million. Now, VIA and private developer DreamOn Group are planning a commercial and residential development that will center around Centro Plaza — and for which they will seek funding from the City of San Antonio and Bexar County.

In order to ensure residents on the West Side have the resources they need to combat displacement and undemocratic development, VIA must build affordable units, repair sidewalks and streets near the Scobey Complex and make a conscious effort to ensure that the Scobey redevelopment gives back to current Westside residents.

First and foremost, it is vital that VIA build units that are affordable to the neighborhood. The average household income in the 78207 zip code is around \$26,000, with more than a third of its residents living in poverty. VIA's proposal to build half of Scobey's units at market rate directly puts half of these units out of reach for folks in the surrounding area. This is a textbook recipe for displacement. VIA's senior vice president of development and planning, Kammy Horne, also sits on the city's Housing Commission, which is charged with finding ways to increase deeper affordability in each project they discuss. Ensuring that affordable housing, either at 30% AMI or income-based, is included in VIA's plan for the Scobey Complex is essential to protect low-income residents who have a right to stay in their neighborhood.

In the six years since purchasing Scobey in 2017, VIA, as a public entity, has benefited from not having to pay property taxes. In one of the poorest zip codes in the country, this means a lack of economic development for the most vulnerable residents. For those six years, the near West Side has been deprived of property tax revenue that could've brought more pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to an area that desperately needs it.

VIA can start by repairing its own sidewalks and streets near the Scobey Complex. This is important in order to ensure that local tax dollars are reinvested back into the community by holding public

entities accountable for maintaining their own land investments. The money saved from spending additional tax dollars can be reinvested into the pedestrian infrastructure in the 78207 zip code.

If VIA wishes to seek public dollars from the City of San Antonio, they must pay 78207 residents first. VIA is a public entity that is funded by public tax dollars. It is unacceptable for a public entity to deprive property tax revenue from our most vulnerable residents. It is even more unacceptable to expect low-income residents to subsidize the gentrification of their neighborhood that would ultimately displace them.

To truly economically empower the West Side, VIA must guarantee all nearby residents priority hiring at the new shops the Scobey building will host, and that those new jobs pay a livable wage of \$17.50 an hour. Additionally, to truly encourage public transit usage, nearby residents deserve access to free bus passes.

VIA is indebted to the West Side. It is vital that VIA provides deeper housing affordability, competitive wages, better pedestrian infrastructure and free bus passes to 78207 residents. We must stop recounting some distorted version of economic development and make public dollars work for the public good.

BIO: Uel Trejo-Rivera is a housing advocate and active in community discussions relating to housing & the environment. She is policy director for San Antonio City Council's District 1 and wrote this article for the San Antonio Report, April 27, 2023.

VIA and private developer DreamOn Group are planning to redevelop the Scobey Storage Complex near Centro Plaza.
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