

Choose Barrio Over Profit at Scobey

Protests at the VÍA board meeting brought together community members, Escuelita students, Esperanza staff and interns as well as City Councilwoman, Terri Castillo (center with raised fist), to voice concerns about VÍA's development plans for the Scobey building and how that will affect the Westside and its residents.



EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following article was written and compiled by interns working at the Esperanza center this summer. Many thanks to the interns: Nonye Okoye, Kai Velásquez and Lily Zeng, and Luis-sana Santibañez, Escuelita instructor, who aided in the process.*

On May 23, 2023, after multiple cancellations of open house meetings and an overall avoidance of community input, Westside community members decided to organize and voice their concerns at the VÍA board meeting, regarding VÍA's plan for development of the Scobey building. Located on 301 N. Medina St, The Scobey complex, which once served as industrial storage, was initially purchased by VÍA in 2017. VÍA's plans for the Scobey buildings are to convert them into spaces for luxury apartments, high end offices, and retail stores. The housing that is being offered is well beyond the range of affordability for the residents of the Westside, with the lowest option set to be within 60% of the area median income, approximately \$47,460 for a family of three.

Questions still exist regarding the nature of these units: how many bedrooms are allotted in a "family unit", what does the square footage look like, and will tax credits and exemptions from private-public partnership guarantee deep affordability for the community they exist in?

The plans for the Scobey building have been referred to as being a "catalyst" for other development projects on the Westside. However, many residents and community members fear that it could be a catalyst for continuous displacement for residents of the Westside. It is evident that the housing that VÍA intends to create is not intended for the people of the Westside, for a third of the residents live in

poverty and the average median income of zip code 78207 is \$26,000. The Westside needs housing that is deeply affordable, for the people that live there, not for gentrifiers.

Here are some excerpts of powerful public comments made by people at the VÍA board meeting:

Esperanza's summer interns joined staff & Escuelita students protesting VÍA's plans for the Scobey building without regard for Westside residents.



"Our residents are not opposed to development in our community. However, development should not come at the expense of our residents... Our association cannot support VÍA's current proposal which would only provide 10% of the housing units at 60% Area Median Income (AMI), which are not even affordable to a majority of our residents. If VÍA wants to become a housing developer, it cannot ignore the housing crisis that exists in our city, particularly for people that earn 30% AMI or below. The city's strategic housing implementation plan specifically states that the housing at 50 and 30 percent AMI and below are what is most needed to address the housing crisis... If VÍA wants to go into development it should do so in a way that considers the quality of life for hotel housekeepers, restaurant staff, and public school teachers and individuals who are hardworking but still do not earn enough to pay rent at \$1245 for a one bedroom apartment, which is what your development is proposing."

—Leticia Sanchez, co-chair of the Historic Westside Residents Association.



Graciela Sánchez, director of the Esperanza, celebrates the graduation of Escuelita's students in their first year. She was an active participant in the Escuelita's programming and in events such as the protest at VÍA.

"This is a historical neighborhood. This is where the Mexicano community and all the communities came because of that bus, that railroad station. We appreciate your interest in breathing life into Scobey with the intent to create housing for community members; however, your current scope of housing



doesn't create any extremely affordable housing for most of the people who live in the 78207 zip code or who take the bus at the Central Plaza Transit Station... Yes, to restoring and rehabilitating the building, but no to the housing that you are currently developing. The Chicano Mexican-American community was segregated and pushed by the city leaders into the Westside over a hundred years ago. The current Scobey housing plan continues to segregate us—the wealthy and the middle class versus the working class poor and houseless. You have an opportunity to avoid the mistakes of the past, and you all should know better not to create the divisions and inequities of the past. You have a major opportunity to house people who need housing... We are watching you VÍA, and we will not disappear."

—Graciela Sanchez, Founder and Executive Director of the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center

"We...would like to know the number of bedrooms in those 10 units for households earning 60% (\$49,740 for a family of four; \$34,860 for a single person) of the AMI. We would like to be clear about how many bedrooms are in those 10 units. We would also like you to add another layer of AMI's to reach those wage earners who earn 30% of the AMI (or \$24,850 per year for a family of 4). There is a need for yet another layer of "affordable" units for those wage earners at the federal \$7.25/hr minimum wage that earns \$15,080/yr and waitresses who are "guaranteed" \$2.13/hr in wages. And, yet, another for those who have had workplace accidents and get \$1000 a month on Social Security Disability... The study conducted by Visit San Antonio reveals that tourism and hospitality businesses generated a total of \$16.2 billion in revenue for the San Antonio economy and showcases the importance of tourism and hospitality in San Antonio. If this is the case, then how do we support those workers of the tourism and hospitality industry who are driving the top economic producer for the City...? Remember that the public schools in the area would not receive funding from the Scobey property because of the property tax exemption... The practice of exempting developers from paying property taxes for up to 99 years is part of the problem"

—Rebecca Flores, District 5 resident

"Today I speak for the voiceless youth and the mothers of the Westside. Please take us into consideration and use this building to help the community, invest into our youth, invest in the new teenage adults and the parents of the Westside. Greet them with resources. Offer a place to feel free during hardships. Some ideas can be a resource center for locals to learn basic skills like balancing a checkbook or financial literacy which can help them apply for assistance for financial aid for students."

—Jeanette Mesa, Alazan-Apache resident

"I couldn't help but notice that a lot of people said that they weren't completely opposed to the development of Scobey, but that what they are opposed to is the fact that VÍA has not engaged the existing community with their plans... I call it conscientious development. For too long the community has not been taken into account and has been left to fend for itself for decades. All of a sudden now there's a newfound interest in our

community. Taxes are going up, people are being displaced, and those of us that have been there since the late 50's-60's we're trying to find a way to maintain our existence there on the Westside and continue to enhance the beautiful cultura that has long dwelled in the Westside."

—Jaime Macias, community member

"My name is Anna and I am a mother of six children who lives in the 78270 zip code. I ride the 68, the 5, 24, and 77 every day... If you were to develop, I wouldn't qualify to live in the housing. But I know with everything that I have contributed to my community, I deserve to be a tenant there."

—Anna Casteñeda, Alazan-Apache resident

Genuine community engagement and inclusion, transparency in decision making between VÍA & Dream On and ethical public-private partnership contracts that guarantee deeper housing affordability and overall public benefit for the community that it exists in, are just a few demands that are non-negotiables for the residents of the historic Westside who care about preserving its barrio for future generations to come.

To learn more & join the fight against gentrification and displacement projects in San Antonio, visit @pueblooverprofit_satx on Instagram or contact the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center for future actions and plans.

The Esperanza Peace & Justice Center located across from VÍA offices on San Pedro Ave and Evergreen St. allowed staff members, Imane Saliba and Angel Cantú, to join in the protest of plans for the development of the Scobey building that VÍA is spearheading.

