

What's Going on in Rat City?
An Analysis of Queer Space in White Center

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Abstract

Why White Center? A Case Study on the Expansion of
Queer Space in the Puget Sound

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This paper assesses ongoing change occurring in White Center, an unincorporated community directly south of Seattle. Beginning in the 1970s, several waves of immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Central America came to Washington state and settled in White Center. This community now faces gentrification and displacement, amid a rise in prominence of a burgeoning LGBTQ community in White Center. Using media narratives, interviews with key informants in White Center's LGBTQ community, and my own personal observations, this thesis investigates the changes that White Center has experienced, and looks towards the future of this unincorporated community. This investigation includes an assessment of how the gentrification of Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood has ramifications on the gentrification that White Center is experiencing.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The term gayborhood is a portmanteau of “gay” and “neighborhood,” and is used to describe places where queer people have laid claim to the built environment.

Gayborhoods are identifiable by a geographic focal point, have a unique culture where the tone is set by the LGBTQ community, have a concentration of LGBTQ residences, and maintain a cluster of LGBTQ owned/operated/allied commercial spaces (Ghaziani, 2014). Not exclusively a neighborhood for gay men, this label indicates a queer geography that has been and is home to queer people of all races, genders, income levels, and identities. These enclaves emerged in response to a specific form of harassment and violence against the LGBTQ community in the post-World War II period, and have continued to serve as a physical home for the queer community, in spite of claims to the contrary (Lauria and Knopp, 1985) (Ghaziani, 2014).

The collection of literature that has researched queer space in the built environment has had a particular fixation on gayborhoods and the cisgender white gay men that became associated with their prominence. Whereas previous iterations of queer space were relatively unknown to broader society, the knowledge of the existence of gayborhoods has transcended the queer community, driven by political and social factors. They served as beacons that guided queer people to places where they could find community, becoming household names for geographic locations associated with queer people. Critically, these important spaces for building community and finding safety in self expression are not the only forms of queer space that exist in the built environment. In

more recent additions to the literature, researchers have proposed the notion that change in gayborhoods has resulted in a plateau, wherein a gayborhood is not declining nor thriving as it once was, but remains stamped with the presence of LGBTQ people on the built environment, through institutional anchors and collective memory (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). Even as the makeup of the neighborhood changes and an increasing percentage of non-queer people populate a gayborhood, LGBTQ people may still visit the gayborhood for special events, drag shows, shopping, community services, etc. This begs the question of, “where are queer people living if not in a gayborhood?”

In 2014, prominent gayborhood researcher Amin Ghaziani proposed a framework he refers to as a “cultural archipelago,” an expansion of the limited scope of gayborhood research, understood by asking the question “is this place a gayborhood or not?” An archipelago is a geographic term used to describe a collection of islands related to one another. A local example to the Puget Sound region is the Gulf Archipelago, comprising the internationally divided Gulf Islands and the San Juan Islands. In the context of gayborhood research, each queer space in the built environment is one island in a collection of many spatially separate, regionally related queer spaces. Some islands are central, such as prominent gayborhoods, while some islands are smaller in size, yet still hold meaning for the queer people that live and thrive within their boundaries. All of these islands are connected to one another through the relationships that exist between members of the queer community.

Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood is the preeminent gayborhood in the Puget Sound's cultural archipelago. While not the first iteration of queer space in Seattle, Capitol Hill formed in a similar fashion and timeline as other prominent gayborhoods in the United States, including the Castro in San Francisco, Boystown in Chicago, and Greenwich Village in New York. These large queer islands in their respective cultural archipelagos are joined by smaller, geographically related islands of queer space. As members of the LGBTQ community leave gayborhoods, they form queer communities elsewhere. This is informed by the notion of homophily, or "birds of a feather flock together," which helps to explain why LGBTQ people leave the gayborhood as the overall percentage of queer people decreases, and informs their decision of where to move. While this does not apply to the entire queer community, there are a number of queer people who continue to seek community with other queer people, and through homophily, collect in places where other queer people live.

Ghaziani provides metrics whereby one can map these collections of queer geography. Each area requires either property ownership by queer people, institutional anchors, or a historic landmark designation for a queer business. Through this guide, we can map a number of queer spaces in the Puget Sound. These include White Center, Fremont, Wallingford, Burien, Tacoma, Vashon Island, and many other places where queer people seek to form community without the bounds of a gayborhood. What differentiates a newer queer district from a full scale gayborhood is whether or not the queer community sets the tone of that space.

I've chosen to focus my research on White Center, an unincorporated portion of King County, sandwiched in between West Seattle and Burien.

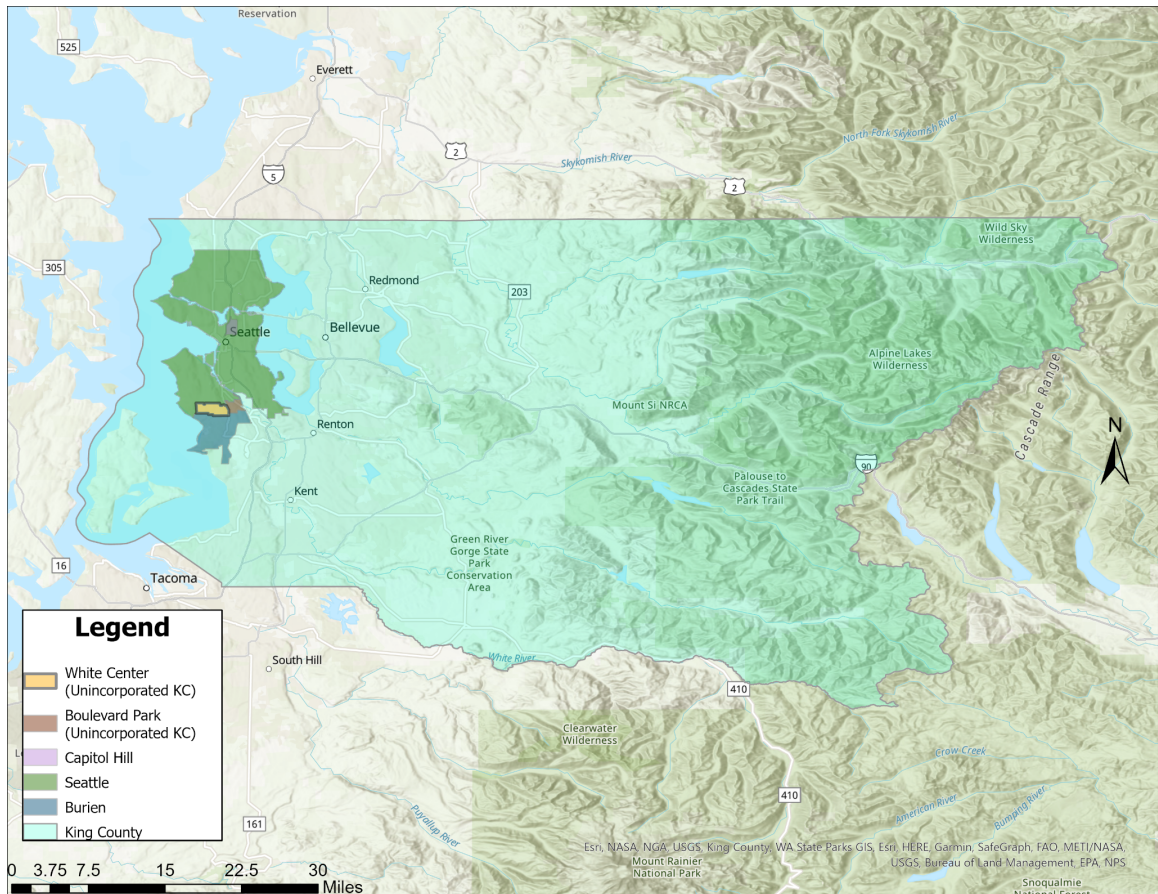


Figure 1 Map of King County

Though unincorporated, White Center is home to a small commercial core on 16th Ave SW, south of SW Roxbury St. This local commercial hub has become home to the Lumber Yard Bar, the community's first gay bar, and Southgate Roller Rink, home to the only skate event oriented towards queer people in the region: Pride Skate Night. In recent years, White Center has been the subject of speculation as an emerging gayborhood in the Seattle region, with some intimating that it may be the “new Capitol Hill” (Burns, 2019).



Figure 2 Map of White Center with Context

My research into White Center seeks to better understand the aspects of White Center that have given rise to its potential status as a new gayborhood in the Puget Sound region. I conducted 10 interviews with key informants of the LGBTQ community in White Center. The interviewees were asked about their personal location decision factors, their experience with the community of White Center, their perspectives on gentrification and displacement in White Center, and their experience with the LGBTQ community in

White Center. Through these interviews, I engaged with a vibrant community of diverse LGBTQ people and allies that enjoy the amenities offered by White Center, who want to see the entire White Center community thrive.

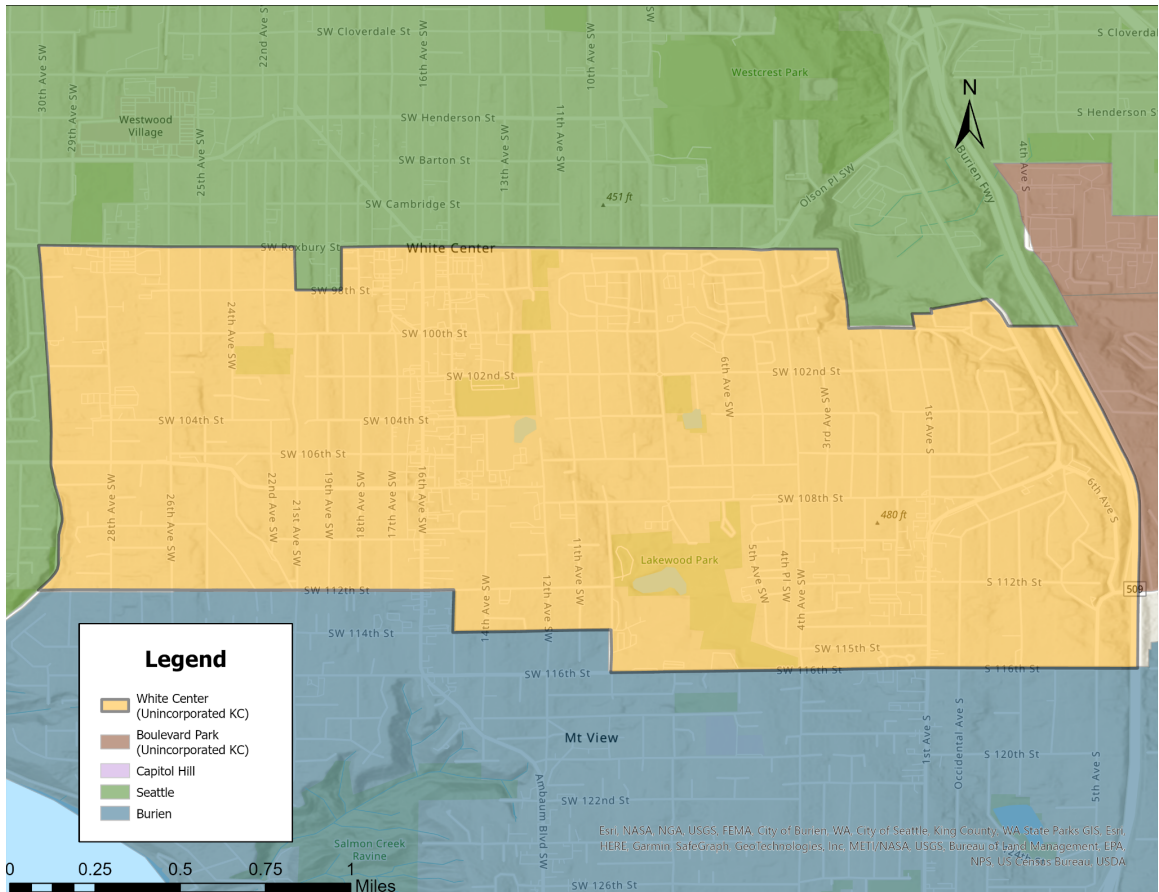


Figure 3 Map of White Center

They expressed concern about the potential for displacement of long term White Center residents, and the inclusivity of their community engagement efforts in respect to the diverse pre-existing White Center communities. These interviews helped me better assess what aspects of White Center have given rise to this prominence. Informed by my review of the existing body of literature on queer space in the built environment, colloquial perspectives, and primary source documents and news stories, I provide my perspective on the circumstances related to White Center’s rise in prominence as a queer space, and

the implications that has for a community actively experiencing change in the built form and the people who make up the community.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

The research on queer space in the built environment has predominantly been focused on gayborhoods, enclaves that formed in the latter half of the twentieth century, with a particular interest in cisgender white gay men. These neighborhoods formed out of a specific reaction to discrimination and fear faced by the LGBTQ community. With time, the LGBTQ community has experienced a relatively rapid increase in legal rights and positive public opinion. With these shifts, among economic concurrent economic trends, the queer community has expanded beyond traditional gayborhoods when they choose where to live. Gentrification is a symptom of new neighborhoods that have experienced an increase in the LGBTQ population. These emerging gay districts reflect the multiplicity of queer identities under the LGBTQ umbrella, and weave together to form a cultural archipelago of interconnected queer space. The phenomenon of queer relationships influencing personal location decision factors has implications for the planning profession. Additionally, COVID-19 offers important lessons about what can be learned from the LGBTQ community's response to the HIV epidemic, and how the research into queer space in the built environment can be expanded beyond the exclusive gayborhood moniker.

1. Gay and Lesbian Settlement Patterns

There have been several researchers who have sought to understand the mechanisms that might inform settlement patterns of gay and lesbian couples. This particular fixation on same-sex couples is a product of the tools available to inform such research, and the potential for a sizable return on investment in these communities. Black et al. (2000) assessed the validity of available social data sets that incorporate LGBTQ demographics. Their research found that the General Social Survey (GSS) and National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSIS) both provide access to small samples of gays and lesbians with measurement errors, whereas the US Census provides access to a much larger sample of gays and lesbians but are limited to same-sex households. In the US Census, individual gays and lesbians are unaccounted for, which has been used to inform a majority of LGBTQ demographic research.

Black et al. (2002) conducted further demographic research to understand influential factors on the location decisions of gay men. Their research found that there is strong evidence to support the notion that gay households tend to locate disproportionately in metropolitan areas with high housing costs and in cities that have less hostile attitudes toward gays. Their explanation for these findings is that gay men find it economically optimal to locate in high-amenity, high cost-of-living cities to a higher degree than other individuals. One explanation for this economic optimization is that gayborhoods were formed as “a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” experienced by the LGBTQ community (Lauria and Knopp, 1985). However, Black et. al (2002) did not apply any sort of racial demographic analysis to this research, so it may not be applicable

to racial subsets of the gay community, given the income disparities that exist between White people and Black people.

While Black et al. rooted their research in empirical data, not all research into the LGBTQ community has been so thorough. One of the most influential and controversial researchers in this field of study is Richard Florida. In his text on the rise of the creative class, Florida put forth a “gay index,” which claimed that the concentration of gay men in a neighborhood was indicative of creativity, desirability, and diversity (Florida, 2002). However, as Alex Bitterman (2020) describes, Florida’s index failed to account for confounding factors that have influenced the formation and transformation of gayborhoods throughout the country. Nevertheless, informed by Florida’s suspect and misguided research, real estate investors strategically directed their capital into the development of gay neighborhoods, catalyzing hyper-gentrification in many gay enclaves (including the South End in Boston, the Castro in San Francisco, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, and Chelsea in New York) (Bitterman, 2020).

This hyper-gentrification is defined as significant investment in neighborhoods that attract desirable amenities and produce quality housing, resulting in geographic areas that are appealing to mainstream residents and buyers (Bitterman, 2016). Bitterman (2020) called on academics to further expand the study of gayborhoods past the reductive notions of the past. He specifically identified the “gay index,” championed by Richard Florida, which directed real estate investors to invest in gay neighborhoods and catalyze hyper-gentrification in these spatial enclaves (Florida, 2002; Hess, 2019). Bitterman

explains that Florida's research did not account for several confounding factors related to the formation and transformation of these enclaves. Bitterman also introduces the idea of "seed communities - formative pockets that are too small yet to be considered proper neighborhoods" as the future potential for the next generation of gayborhoods, and is indicative of a potential urban and suburban LGBTQ diaspora of sorts.

Gayborhoods

It has been amidst this back-to-the-city movement that the perceived decline of gay neighborhoods, known as gayborhoods, has been raised and researched. In 2007, the New York Times published an article titled "Gay Enclaves Face Prospect of Being Passé," which described the apparent decline of the Castro, San Francisco's preeminent gayborhood. That same year, an article titled "There Goes the Gayborhood" was published in a Chicago newspaper, lamenting the decline of Chicago's gayborhood Boystown. These articles sparked an increased interest in demographic research of the spatial communities that formed around prominent and visible LGBTQ populations in the post-WWII era.

The research of gayborhoods fall into four general research streams: gayborhood origin and ontology; the organizational form of gayborhoods; technology's impact on gayborhoods; and gayborhood change over time, including the spatial dispersion of queer people into the broader city/regional/rural context (Ghaziani, 2021). Notably, these are not exclusive silos of investigation, as many scholars will incorporate multiple foci when conducting gayborhood research.

a. Gayborhood Definition

In “There Goes the Gayborhood?”, author Amin Ghanziani (2014) provides a framework through which a neighborhood can be identified as a gayborhood. Gayborhoods have four distinct qualities: they are places with a distinct geographic focal point; they have a unique culture where gays set the tone of the neighborhood; they have a concentration of LGBTQ residences; and they have a cluster of commercial spaces, broadly defined as gay-owned and gay-friendly LGBTQ spaces, including non-profit associations and community centers that appeal to the broader LGBTQ community, not exclusively the neighborhood’s residents.

b. Gayborhood Change

The establishment of gay urban culture did not begin with the prominent gayborhoods that we conceptualize today. Gay urban space first took the form of a “topography of gay meeting places” (p. 13), predominantly found in urban neighborhoods in the late 19th century through WWII. This gay urban geography relied on secrecy, isolation, discretion, and was associated with feelings of shame and fear by many LGBTQ people who would visit or frequent those gay meeting places.

Public facing gay enclaves increasingly emerged in what Ghaziani refers to as the “coming out” period in the United States, which covers the years following WWII until the Stonewall riots of 1969. In the wake of the Stonewall riots, gay neighborhoods as “distinct” (p. 16) urban spaces began to develop and grow, providing safety, sexual freedom, and tolerance for sexually nonconformist populations. The neighborhoods that

emerged following Stonewall are the places that we conventionally think of as gayborhoods (e.g. The Village, New York; The Castro, San Francisco; Boystown, Chicago; Capitol Hill, Seattle; etc.). It is in these spatial enclaves that LGBTQ people were able to organize, establish community, and build political power in the public eye.

Gay enclaves have existed in a variety of iterations before coalescing into the institutional gayborhoods we know of today. While inquiries into the topic of gayborhood change focused at one point in time on the question “are gay neighborhoods really disappearing?” (Ghaziani, 2014), gayborhood researchers have found that gayborhoods are changing and have reached a “plateau” at this point in their maturation (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). Tracing the presence of gays and lesbians in urban environs back through to the “scattered gay places” (Forsyth, 2001) of the pre-WWII era, including Harlem and Greenwich Village in New York, we can see that gay urban spaces have constantly experienced change and fluctuation.

In assessing more contemporary mechanisms of change in modern prominent gayborhoods, researchers have found that established gayborhoods have become “less gay”, and more mainstream. In relation to this phenomenon, many LGBTQ residents have moved to new neighborhoods and communities, simultaneously making these communities “more gay” and suggesting the “decline” of the aforementioned gay neighborhoods. The claims of the potential for decline of gayborhoods should be assessed through the whole history of gay urban spaces, to better understand the pattern of formation and decline of gay space in the urban context.

To that end, Ghaziani borrows the term “post-gay” from Paul Borston, which refers to the contemporary expanded gay identity and landscape, largely the result of an increased acceptance of homosexuality by the society at-large. What has been observed in this period is an exodus of LGBTQ people from the distinct queer geographies defined as gayborhoods, amidst a subsequent influx of straight residents. Ghaziani points to a variety of factors that can be associated with gayborhood change in a “post-gay” world. Namely, the impacts of assimilationist attitudes, the expanding residential imagination of gays and lesbians, and a number of “triggers” that include: changing relationships with urban spaces as you age; a new generation of gays and lesbians who have grown up “coming out earlier” and may not “feel as much of a need to amass with [gay and lesbian] people”; an increasing number of gays and lesbians having children, sparking a desire to relocate for better schools and supportive infrastructure; and the decoupling of community from geography, associated with the rise in the number of active users engaged in meeting potential sexual and romantic partners through the Internet.

Ghaziani’s research was primarily conducted in Chicago’s Boystown and Andersonville neighborhoods, focused on the change their residents were experiencing in the “post-gay” period. Among other methods, this included conducting interviews with 125 gay and straight people that lived, and/or conducted business, or are a public figure in either the Boystown or Andersonville neighborhoods. Ghaziani is able to assess the aforementioned factors influencing gayborhood change through the lived experiences of these Chicagoans.

c. Expanding Residential Imagination

One notion that Ghaziani (2014) seeks to understand is the “expanding residential imagination” that has coincided with assimilation into broader heterosexual society by LGBTQ individuals. Increasing assimilation coupled with the increased acceptance of homosexuality are broadening the spatial possibilities of gay and lesbian individuals from the defined gayborhood to the city at large. This impact is not exclusive to single cities with gayborhoods, as this “geographic reordering” (p. 42) is occurring at all levels along the urban/suburban/exurban/rural spectrum of the built environment in the United States. Ghaziani closes this point by noting that expansion is “an incomplete yet ongoing and complex perceptual process that plays out on a day-to-day basis as legislative victories compete with lingering homophobia” (p. 75).

Related to the assimilationist attitude of some LGBTQ individuals is the notion that being gay or lesbian doesn’t matter anymore. However, the people who expressed this sentiment to Ghaziani also live in areas that either have a sizable presence of gays and lesbians, or once did. This idea is reinforced by the perspectives of straight people, some of whom shared with Ghaziani that “integration is the desired outcome that everyone seeks” (p. 83). This begs the question, who is “everyone”? A straight person even went so far as to claim that gay people living in gayborhoods are causing themselves political harm by alienating populations that aren’t gay, but live in the same gay neighborhoods. Another straight person stated that they feel discriminated against as a single white woman, but wouldn’t want to live in a neighborhood composed primarily of single white women. It is with this context that Ghaziani reminds the reader that “homophobia and

heterosexism are institutional systems that are held in place by visible and invisible webs of laws, media images, socialization, school curricula, employment policies, housing ordinances, and so on.” (p. 96) He goes on to note that this direct comparison is unconvincing, given that there doesn’t exist a similar web that supports “anti-heterosexuality.” In spite of the invisible webs of homophobia and heterosexism, gay and lesbian individuals are “no longer limited to isolated islands of meaning” as the residential imagination of gays and lesbians expands past the boundaries of the gayborhood to the entire city (p. 96).

d. Emerging Gay Districts

The research on gay urban spaces has not necessarily followed this suggested reorientation towards a framework of multiplicity. In 2021, Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Hess edited an open access book, “The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Renaissance and Resurgence,” which compiled gayborhood focused research from a number of authors on the subject. The research presented in this text focuses on a broad variety of issues related to sexuality’s manifestations on the built environment, and synthesized 8 takeaway messages from the seventeen chapters of their book. They found that gayborhoods matter, are inclusive of the LGBTQ community as a whole and not exclusive to gay men, are becoming less gay, and have reached a plateau in their maturation process; that virtual connections enhance, and do not diminish, gayborhoods; that the disappearance of gayborhoods could reduce the prevalence of safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community; that same-sex couples have shifted their residences

away from gayborhoods; and that gayborhood history and evolution is empowering for the LGBTQ+ community (Bitterman & Hess, 2021).

The contributing researchers investigated a variety of topics, including: how the populations of gayborhoods are changing (Hess & Bitterman, 2021); how same-sex male household populations are shifting within desegregating cities (Spring, 2021); the way we inadequately assess queer populations through the administration of the United States Census (Frisch, 2021); why gayborhoods still matter (Ghaziani, 2021); how the concentration of rainbow flag displays can indicate the presence of LGBTQ people in a neighborhood (Bitterman, 2021); how an influx of heterosexual residents can impact the sexual expression of a gayborhood (Stone, 2021); how placemaking by different actors can have different goals and impacts on a gayborhood or gay district (Niedt, 2021); the impacts that higher densities of same-sex households can have on the health of a community (Wienke et. al, 2021); the impact that digital technologies are having (or aren't having) on prominent gayborhoods (Miles, 2021); the collection of gay bars that loosely define Antwerp's gay district (Eeckhout et. al, 2021); the historical geographic and planning processes that led to the creation of gayborhoods in Sydney and Toronto (Gorman-Murry & Nash, 2021); how models of centripetal and centrifugal force can be used to assess the forces changing gayborhoods in Atlanta and Istanbul (Doan and Atalay, 2021); the emergence and subsequent dispersion of a new form of queer urbanism in Montréal's Mile End, and it's relationship with Montréal's established gay village (Podmore, 2021); the assessment of a layering effect that impacts generational gaps in the LGBTQ community based on age and the age of when an individual comes out (if ever)

(Bitterman & Hess, 2021); the commemoration (and lack thereof) of historically gay places in the United States (Miller & Bitterman, 2021); the plateaus and afterglows of gayborhoods in the face of out-migrations of same-sex households (Coffin, 2021); and insights related to gay neighborhoods and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Miles et. al, 2021).

This body of research represents a wealth of knowledge and resources for the study of sexual minorities in the built environment, assessing the various drivers of change in gayborhoods, including gentrification, the digitization of the queer community through social media and hookup apps, displacement, commodification of queer symbology, tourism, and declining rates of self-segregation.

In a review of “The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Renaissance and Resurgence,” Manish Chalana (2022) highlights that this research most notably expands on the meanings that can be applied to gayborhood transformation. He refers to Julie Podmore’s (2021) study of Montréal’s Mile End, a neighborhood that experienced urban transformation by young, distinctly queer identifying residents who valued the inclusion of all queer sexual identities and had a more complex perspective and understanding of gender, without the restrictive bounds of the colonial, heteronormative gender binary. While this neighborhood has experienced gentrification and no longer maintains the queer subculture that was formed within its spatial bounds, it was a unique type of queer urbanism that was not defined by the commercialization of queer space as a means to establish community.

The researchers confirmed Ghaziani's (2019) argument that cultural archipelagos "exist in a productive tension with gay spaces like gayborhoods" (p. 12), in that Montréal's Mile End queer subculture is related to the gay village through interpersonal connections. However, a distinction is drawn between the two districts by Mile End's "with-in group" dynamics based on class and generational cohorts, as opposed to the more prominent, established gay village that formed as a "city on a hill" for the gay community, similar to many other prominent gayborhoods in the Western world (p. 303). The Mile End case study indicates that the lines between these two neighborhoods informed by LGBTQ identities may be more solid than the permeable framework proffered by Ghaziani (2019), in part due to the proclivity for Queer Mile Enders to prefer association with other like minded individuals over the LGBTQ subcultures that exist elsewhere. Podmore concludes their research with the suggestion that a greater focus be applied in future research to alternate neighborhood formation processes to "capture the contemporary reshaping of the queer city after the gay village" (Podmore, 2021, 303).

Chalana also refers to chapter 17, where Coffin investigates how we can move beyond thinking about the future of gayborhoods in a restrictive binary of persistence or decline. Rooted in the concept of "post-place," Coffin argues that even if a gayborhood ceased to exist as we conceptualize them today, they would exude an "afterglow" through digital traces, memory, and the collective imagination of the culture that has come to define them, and "have an afterlife even if its physical presence is lost" (Coffin, 2021, 381).

“The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods” is not without its drawbacks. Chalana provides a valid critique of the work, namely that the research lacked diversity in both the demographics of the contributing researchers, who are predominantly male and White, and the locations in which the research was conducted, which are primarily located in the Global North. Bitterman and Hess make clear from the outset that they are at least aware of this issue. However, that doesn’t necessarily make up for the research’s perpetuation of the focus on gay spaces that were formed by, and have historically centered, cis White gay men over the other facets of the LGBTQ community. Doan and Atalay argue in Chapter 12 of the text that the focus on these gay spaces comes at the cost of “research on other types of LGBTQ areas as well as other geographies beyond the Global North” (Doan & Atalay, 2021, 261).

The Matador Network is a travel site that has a mission to “empower a diverse generation of modern adventurers to share their stories and travel fearlessly” (Matador). In an article titled “Meet the New Gayborhoods of the US,” a number of locations across the country are being promoted as new gayborhoods in the U.S. Included are Andersonville for Chicago; Downtown LA (DTLA) for Los Angeles; Lake Merritt, Oakland for the San Francisco Bay Area; Decatur, East Atlanta, and Buckhead for Atlanta; Logan Circle and Shaw for Washington, D.C.; and Williamsburg, Bushwick, Hell’s Kitchen, etc. for New York City (Garry, 2020). These shifts in the spatial organization of LGBTQ people in the built environment are the result of gentrification of gayborhoods, in the form of increased rental prices that displace lower income residents, and the penchant to assimilate to more

heteronormative environments, associated with increasing acceptance by the greater society (Garry, 2020; Ghaziani, 2014).

e. Cultural Archipelagos

Ghaziani focuses the second part of his book on understanding how gay urban spaces can continue into the future. He frames this investigation by noting that claims asserting the decline and demise of prominent, established gayborhoods are naive and unrealistic, noting that the “persist-or-parish binary about the fate of these areas is simply untenable” (p. 133). What he finds is that the disappearance of LGBTQ people from a gayborhood is possibly the overall resettling of the gay population in another urban/suburban/rural locale adjacent to the prominent gayborhood. It is from this notion that Ghaziani coined the term cultural archipelago, which he defines as “multiple clusters of gay and lesbian populations [that] are emerging in cities of different sizes, and...in the suburbs and in rural areas as well” (p. 137). The mechanism by which these cultural archipelagos generate themselves is through the sociological phenomenon known as homophily, which can be characterized by the phrase “birds of a feather flock together.” Sociologists Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James Cook (2001) state that “[h]omophily limits people’s social worlds,” the tendency by which cultural archipelagos form in response to how and with whom we socially engage. Ghaziani adds, based on Census data from 2000 and 2010, that same-sex households are making similar choices about where to go once they leave the gayborhood, “pioneering new settlements in smaller towns” (p. 141).

3. Back-to-the-City Movement

For roughly three decades from 1960 to 1990, cities experienced urban flight from the city center to surrounding suburban neighborhoods. Following that period characterized by the continued decrease in population density of urban cores, there has been a resurgence of population growth and capital investment in these locales since the 1990s. Among other monikers, this trend reversal has been dubbed the “back-to-the-city” movement and is associated with the redevelopment of primarily low-income, African American neighborhoods (Hyra, 2015).

4. Gay Gentrification: Victims and Perpetrators

Doan and Higgins (2011) conducted a case study of Atlanta’s Midtown gayborhood as it was experiencing gentrification and fast-tracked development. They found that gentrification altering the Midtown neighborhood of Atlanta had cascading effects on other neighborhoods. This new wave of gentrification, which followed the initial wave of gentrification by LGBT people, was executed by large developers. City planners who sought to “modernize” Atlanta through changes to the approval process for development and zoning reforms, enabled this development that has significantly altered the urban context of LGBT neighborhoods in and around Atlanta. This represented trade-offs within the LGBT community, as the LGBT people that put in sweat-equity saw robust returns on their investment through the increase in property values, while simultaneously there has been a marked decrease in the safety and tolerance for visibly queer people in the Midtown gayborhood. Some supportive LGBT aspects of the Midtown gayborhood

persisted, but the safety and community that these spatial enclaves were once able to provide has been diluted by the suburbanization of gays and lesbians with capital. These upwardly mobile gays and lesbians overlooked the negative impacts that their economic aspirations of increasing their home values have had on the political movement for gay liberation and ability to spatially form community.

Doan & Higgins also found that many LGBT people still look to established gay enclaves to partake in social needs, including community support, dating, social life, and entertainment. However, these enclaves are becoming increasingly unaffordable for many LGBT individuals to choose as a residential location. This has impacted the gay liberation movement, as it makes organizing for LGBTQ rights and electing politicians that will advocate for LGBT concerns more difficult. Simultaneously, younger and less affluent LGBT people continue to engage in sweat-equity gentrification in communities that they can still afford, in part due to reasons related to homophily of LGBT culture, which persists at the same time that many LGBT people are geared towards assimilation into greater society. This gentrification by LGBT communities into suburban neighborhoods that are home to predominantly minority communities has led to racial tension and class strife, some of the cascading effects that the LGBT community has created in their search to establish new forms of community within tolerant places (Doan & Higgins, 2011).

Christafore and Leguizamon (2018) sought to empirically understand if the presence of same-sex households was an indicator of gentrification, and if that relationship was

causal or by association. Their research included the analysis of more than 30,000 census tracts throughout the United States. In an analysis focused on the poorest 25% of census tracts between 2000 and 2010, they found support for their hypothesis, namely that a 1% increase in same-sex coupled households is associated with an increase in the probability that the census tract will gentrify by almost 2-3%. The influence of this effect remained, even after controlling for family size, average income, presence of different-sex unmarried couples, and distance to the downtown locals. While these findings are compelling, they should not be considered a resounding confirmation that gays and lesbians are the sole factor that determines if a neighborhood will gentrify, as this phenomenon is complex and influenced by a variety of other factors that cannot be controlled for in a research study.

Hess (2019) further assessed the effects of gentrification on gayborhoods. Many traditional gayborhoods have experienced hyper-gentrification, which has pushed low- and middle-income LGBTQ individuals from these spatial enclaves. This transformation has resulted in decreased levels of self-selected segregation of same-sex households and a new LGBTQ urban landscape, with more same-sex couples living in areas that are not exclusively or predominantly LGBTQ oriented.

The aforementioned predisposition to co-locate in new locales (homophily) amidst the perceived decline of gay urban space follows a pattern that has existed among gays and lesbians in the built environment since well before the establishment of prominent gayborhoods. Using Chicago and New York as examples, Ghaziani (2014) is able to

establish historical trends that are associated with the impact that LGBTQ communities have had on urban change. Gays and lesbians would move into urban spaces that were undesirable or run down, where they could exist with each other devoid of prevailing societal notions of “moral fear, judgement, or discrimination” (p. 144). They then invest in the neighborhood, and once a number of broadly appealing amenities are introduced, straight people are enticed to move in, leading to the out migration of gays and lesbians. Thus, in the words of Ghaziani, “through the culturally destructive processes of gentrification, the neighborhood loses its queer sensibilities” (p. 144). Ghaziani notes that in order to map these queer archipelagos through time, each area requires property ownership, institutional anchors, or the designation of a queer business as a national historical landmark.

It is through these historical perspectives that Ghaziani makes a prediction about the future of cultural archipelagos:

I suspect that urban areas will develop in a sequence from gay-friendly places initially to full-on gayborhoods later. The former are those where gays and lesbians feel safe and comfortable to be themselves, but they do not “set the tone,” to borrow a critical phrase from the historian George Chauncey. Once they do, a gay-friendly area becomes a gayborhood. (p. 150)

The singular idea of cultural archipelagos is assessed further by Ghaziani in a separate article published in 2019. This essay focuses on the notion of cultural archipelagos through the experiences of lesbians, trans individuals, same-sex families with children, and queer people of color. While not an exhaustive list, these experiences differ from the broad coverage of cisgender white gay men in queer studies on the built environment. The conclusion that Ghaziani finds in the augmentation of his initial foray into cultural

archipelagos is to call for an expansion of queer urban studies past the trend of focusing on a singular gayborhood or gay district. In part, this conclusion is guided by a Pew Research Center poll that surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,197 self-identified LGBT Americans aged 18 years or older. Of this sample, 72% of respondents indicated that they have never lived in a gayborhood, and yet the urban studies of queer geography have had an almost singular focus on these enclaves. Ghaziani makes a compelling case that we need new conceptual tools, and that the study of sexuality and space evolve from assumptions of singularity to the reality of queer urban spaces, which is one of constant change and multiplicity (Ghaziani, 2019).

5. Planning with LGBTQ Communities

The literature that assesses the field of planning's relationship with the LGBTQ community has two pioneering authors, Ann Forsyth (2001) and Michael Frisch (2002). Their research is in response to the increased prevalence of the LGBTQ community in greater society, amidst other nonconformist communities. Forsyth's research into these communities and their interactions with planners provides a roadmap to foster an understanding of how the LGBTQ community has and will continue to engage with the planning profession. Frisch's paper titled "Planning as a Heterosexist Project" has important conclusions about the development of planning as a tool to reinforce heterosexist structures of society. Petra Doan (2015) is another author of prominence on this topic, making the case for a more inclusive planning practice as it pertains to the broad identities that fall under the umbrella of the LGBTQ community.

Frisch defines the planning profession as a social project that typically is characterized by its practitioners as work being for the public good (2002). Through the insights of Flyvbjerg (1998), planning is described as rationalization produced by the exercise of power, which aligns planning with existing societal power structures, rather than work that pushes for social action. This highlights how planning has historically been dominated by prevailing cultural power dynamics, which have excluded marginalized and vulnerable populations, including the LGBTQ community. Frisch defines planning explicitly as a heterosexist project, designed to enforce oppression and maintain heterosexual domination through homosexual panic and the closet, an idea associated with the term “coming out” wherein someone pronounces their sexuality as being other than heterosexual.

Through the lens of three planning dichotomies (order/disorder, family/household, and public/private), Frisch assesses this heterosexist project. They find that within the dichotomy of order/disorder, planning is seen as a direct means of controlling sexuality, and that heterosexuality is promoted through zoning and subsequent suburban sprawl in the form of single family homes. This finding by Frisch leads them to point out that, even in places that are home to a community of “out” people, their lives are still being shaped by a built environment structured for heterosexuals. This begs the question, “What would queer inclusive planning look like?”

Frisch highlights potential answers to this question that have been offered by Richard Sennett (1970) and feminist writers who have developed detailed programs that would

work to achieve the inclusive city. In *The Uses of Disorder*, Sennett (1970) advocates for social mixing through the introduction of complexity and conflict in dense urban environments, what Frisch sums up as spaces of interaction. The detailed programs offered by the feminist writers include zoning reforms such as the redefinition of family, the ability to operate a business from your home, accessory dwelling unit allowance, and the allowance of day care in all zones (Ritzdorf, 1986); the division of large single family homes into duplexes and triplexes as a way to reorganize life in the built environment to empower women (Hayden, 1981); and the redefinition of family to include gays and lesbians. Here, Stacey (1996) also calls for the inclusion of gays and lesbians within the institution of marriage, which was made reality in the United States following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (576 U.S. ____ (2015)). While this ruling made gay marriage legal throughout the United States, there are still national organizations, such as “Focus on the Family,” which continue to exclude non-heterosexual marriages from their core values (Focus).

Unrelated to the push for marriage equality, the bedrock of the heterosexist project that Michael Frisch describes is shifting, as municipalities across the country are eliminating single family zoning as a response to a lack of affordable housing (Barthel, 2023). This will have implications for the heterosexist project, as more variety of housing is incorporated into formerly single-family neighborhoods, and as more alternative family arrangements emerge. In the Family/Household dichotomy of Frisch’s research, they argue that planners actively enacted single-family home zoning policies under the

auspices of “protecting the family,” and juxtaposed single family homes to apartments, which they deemed were locations of “immoral activity.”

Ann Forsyth’s research indicates that, while the LGBTQ community has been neglected by planners, the rise in prominence of LGBTQ identified individuals and community groups will lead to further, increasing interactions with the planning profession. Though this research does not explicitly call for more inclusive planning practices, it indicates that the needs of LGBTQ identified individuals are not marginal to planning, and that planners will need to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the unique issues that LGBTQ people face in order to effectively and equitably produce community informed plans. For example, planners have engaged in planning for sexuality, usually in the form of providing single family homes for heterosexual families and targeting heterosexual couples in tourism advertisements, of which same-sex couples are excluded (Forsyth, 2001).

Doan (2011, 2015) presents a synthesis of these two authors. Their research calls to re-examine planning practice to make the process more inclusive of the entirety of the LGBTQ community. Doan challenges the field of urban planning to think of LGBTQ planning “beyond queer space,” because facets of the LGBTQ community are more diverse and dispersed throughout our landscapes, not limited to the prominent gayborhoods that were established predominantly by white gay men. Doan argues that planners cannot meet their mandate of creating public spaces for everyone, if those

spaces are not accessible to members of a community that don't subscribe to the rigid traditional definitions of gender expression and the gender binary (Doan, 2015).

6. COVID-19 Pandemic

The conclusory chapter of “The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods” discusses some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gayborhood studies. The chapter addresses what can be learned from the study of the response of gay neighborhoods to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and how it can be applied in response to pandemics more broadly. Additionally, the authors assess efforts that could reinforce the future prospects of gayborhoods, including mutual aid networks, institutional anchors and their ability to influence LGBTQ+ placemaking, shifts in the LGBTQ population to new spatial locales in measurable concentrations, the impact that interior design can have on physical spaces, and the use of virtual connection to strengthen social connections. The final piece of this chapter further interrogates how the spatially oriented “gayborhood” moniker might be stifling the development and research of non-spatially defined phenomena taking root in the wake of the pandemic’s onset. They propose the term “typology” as a theoretical framework through which the manifestation of LGBTQ space can be better applied to instances of community that transcend physical space and compared to the shifting spatial manifestations of other topologies. They ultimately suggest that “the life and afterlives of gayborhoods is the conception of plural queer topologies” (Miles et. al, 2021, 415).

Literature Takeaways

One of the key takeaways from the literature assessing the planning profession's relationship with the LGBTQ community is that planners cannot meet their mandate of creating public spaces for everyone if those spaces do not serve people who do not conform to society's rigid definitions of gender and sexual identity (Doan, 2015). This research builds off of findings from Frisch (2002), who highlights the development of the planning profession as a tool to reinforce prevailing societal power structures through the example of single-family zoning. The prevalence of this type of zoning throughout the United States reveals how households that participate in the heteronormative nuclear family structure are being prioritized by the planning profession in the form of single-family zoning, to the detriment of those who do not fit this mold, in particular the queer community.

Another facet of the foundation of Doan's argument, Ann Forsyth's research (2001) indicates that the needs of the LGBTQ community are not marginal to planning, and that planners will need to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the queer community to adequately plan for their needs. How do planners in Seattle and surrounding environs currently engage with and plan for the queer community? Are these processes and approaches conducive to meet the needs of the queer community, among other communities that don't fit the mold of single-family home zoning?

One of the key takeaways from Bitterman & Hess (2021) is that gayborhoods have reached a plateau in their stage of maturation. This, in tandem with Coffin's (2021)

concept of afterglows, reinforces the notion that gayborhoods continue to matter and will have resonating impacts as they change. Gayborhoods are becoming “less gay” as same sex household populations move out of the gayborhood into other parts of the urban/suburban/rural environment, making those locales “more gay.” In the Puget Sound region, Capitol Hill is the preeminent gayborhood. Has this gayborhood hit a plateau and become less gay? If so, what afterglows exist, and how do they factor into the resonance of the gayborhood beyond the presence of queer residents?

This expansion of the LGBTQ community outside of the spatial bounds of prominent gayborhoods is creating a collection of queer urban spaces in line with Ghaziani’s cultural archipelago framework (2014, 2019), that there is a multiplicity of queer space within the built environment. Additionally, Ghaziani’s argument that the study of queer space should move beyond the binary of whether or not an urban space is a gayborhood is critical, especially given the reductive nature that binary represents (Ghaziani, 2019). Does this multiplicity of queer space hold true in the Puget Sound region? How might this multiplicity of interconnected queer space across municipal boundaries in the built environment impact the profession of urban planning?

Research has shown that the increasing presence of gay and lesbian couples in a census tract is positively correlated with imminent gentrification of that tract (Christafore & Leguizamon, 2018). This correlation suggests a relationship between queer people and gentrification. The implications of this relationship could lead to a bias against queer people moving anywhere. However, the more concerning piece is the realistic correlation

between gentrification and queerness. The historic progression of queer people throughout various enclaves in the built environment is a result of capitalist land speculation, not a result of queerness. The research doesn't account for unique dynamics that exist within the queer community, and how queer interpersonal relationships inform movement throughout the built environment. The researchers did control for some economic factors, but would not be able to account for the multiplicity of experiences within the queer community.

The US Census is the most accurate and comprehensive data set available for conducting demographic research in the United States. However, as noted by Frisch (2002, 2021), the US Census only provides data on same-sex households, which omits a large portion of the LGBTQ community from being differentiated in Census data. This focus on same-sex households reinforces the focus on the migration patterns of gay and lesbian partners, as they are the LGBTQ identified groups that we can follow most accurately as they move from place to place. As a matter of policy and planning, it is a problematic notion that the US Census cannot be used to research queer communities the way we research other demographic facets of our diverse society. How can the planning profession meet the mandate of planning for everyone when a sizable minority in the population is invisible in the data used to inform decisions? And how does this lack of accounting for queer people impact the movement of queer people throughout the built environment? If we had better data to understand where queer people live, and the forces that shape their personal location decisions, would queer people still be associated with gentrification of low-income, minority communities? When the onus on where people can live is solely

dictated by market factors, how can an economically stratified community populating a gayborhood be able to remain in place?

Changes in the makeup of gay neighborhoods has been shown to have the potential to reduce the amount of available safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). This is a particularly concerning point, given the harassment and discrimination that influenced the initial formation of gayborhoods (Lauria and Knopp, 1985). Knowing that gayborhoods provide supportive services and safe spaces to the LGBTQ community, how can planners incorporate principles of inclusive planning to make better spaces for everyone living in cities, not just the prevailing heterosexist power structures that have dictated a specific form of exclusionary zoning for decades? What would an inclusive approach to planning look like? To that end, what can be learned from the case of White Center? How can planners, both in the City of Seattle and King County overall, learn from a model of interconnected queer spaces throughout the built environment? What can planners do to prevent the displacement of queer people and related gentrification in new locales? Is this something that planners can even address, or is it without the purview of the profession?

The case of White Center could have implications for regional planning by King County and the city of Seattle, with a particular focus on how the policies enacted by planners are impacting the ability of communities to form and remain in place.

Chapter 3 - Methods

My core research questions are, “How has White Center changed in recent years? How might White Center continue to change in the near future?” Answering these questions will inform my research analysis, which seeks to address the questions I posed in my review of the literature. I center my research on the framing of White Center’s growth and change through primary source material, in the form of news articles and blog posts. To augment my research, I’ve interviewed key informants in the White Center LGBTQ community, who can speak to the factors that brought them to the neighborhood. I also incorporate literature on queer space in the built environment to highlight how the gentrification of the gayborhood on Capitol Hill is displacing this legacy gayborhood, and how the burgeoning LGBTQ presence in White Center is serving as a beacon to signal acceptance and community.

Building the Historical Narrative

I developed a narrative regarding the post-colonial history of White Center, beginning with the Treaty of Point Elliott, which has never fully recognized the rights of the Duwamish, a signatory to the treaty. This narrative was compiled through primary historical sources and media stories that account for the changes that White Center has experienced since its inception post-colonization, and was an essential step in my analysis. I combined a variety of sources to construct a cohesive narrative of the physical and social development of White Center’s identity. This narrative provided context for

the contemporary changes that have occurred in White Center's built environment and community.

Ethical Considerations

My research into White Center's LGBTQ community is research that has been exempted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is responsible for assessing all research that interacts with human beings. The initial name of my study was submitted as "Where Goes the Gayborhood? An Analysis of Transformation and Migration in Seattle's LGBTQ+ Population." (Appendix A). In my ethical approach to this research, I considered my own biases and issues of consent with my interview subjects.

Bias

I sought to remain as impartial as possible during my interviews. To that end, the interviews tended more towards a structured format, wherein I asked standardized questions and let my interviewees answer with minimal guidance, interpretation, or input from my perspective. See Appendix A for the list of questions that each interviewee was asked.

Consent to record and anonymity

At the beginning of each interview, participants agreed to consent to a recording of the interview, conducted over Zoom. This interview process helped with interview schedule flexibility, and provided a transcript of each interview quickly following its conclusion.

White Center is even smaller, all quotes used in this document are anonymous, attributed with demographic information of the participant.

Key Informant Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with ten participants that are members of and/or involved with the LGBTQ community in White Center. The interviews ranged from 23 minutes to 64 minutes, with an average duration of roughly 41 minutes. Interview topics included personal location decision factors, the general White Center community, gentrification and displacement in White Center, and LGBTQ prominence in White Center. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that some questions were asked in a different order, were omitted due to the lack of applicability to the interviewee, or redundancy from an answer given in a previous question. These interviews helped me garner detailed, human-centered information and perspectives related to my research questions. During every interview, I asked the same questions with very little input past clarifying questions. You can see a full list of questions in Appendix B.

Key Informant Identification

Accurate, comprehensive sampling of LGBTQ individuals is not possible using traditional statistical methods. I identified community organizations and individuals that are actively involved with the LGBTQ community in White Center. I contacted them through virtual and in person means of communication to request an interview. I was also connected with a relative of one of my classmates, who is queer and lives in White Center.

Interview Synthesis

Once I completed all of the interviews, I proceeded through an iterative process of analysis to synthesize the responses into general themes. I began by cleaning the transcript of each interview as I listened to the audio playback. Next, I read through each transcript and pulled key quotes that addressed my research question into a new document, organized by the participant's unique interviewee ID to anonymize the data. I read through and applied a label to each quote, describing the general idea or notion that was associated with or expressed through the quote.

My next step in the synthesis process was theme identification. I took each label and organized them into several themes.

Chapter 4 - The Story of White Center

Introduction

White Center is an unincorporated community within King County in Washington state, sandwiched between Seattle's southern city limit and Burien's northern city limit. As of 2020, White Center is one of the most diverse in King County, comprising more than 65% of people of color and a population that is 35% foreign-born. White Center is primarily a working class community, with the most residents working in Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance Occupations (855 people), Food Preparation & Serving Related Occupations (734 people), and Office & Administrative Support Occupations (711 people)(Data USA).

The Treaty of Point Elliott

The area of the Puget Sound where White Center is located has been home to the Duwamish tribe since time immemorial. White Center is situated on a plateau about 4 miles from one of the largest Duwamish villages, Ha-AH-poos, which archaeologists have dated as far back as 600 A.D (Duwamish Tribe, "Visit the Longhouse"). The area was primarily an upland forest, consisting of western hemlock, western red cedar, and Douglas-fir trees, as well as marshy swampland (Waterlines). In 1855, the Treaty of Point Elliott established a government-to-government relationship between the settler colonists from the United States and native tribal leaders from the Duwamish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skagit, and Lummi tribes. This treaty guaranteed hunting and fishing rights and reservations to all tribes represented by the native signatories, in exchange for 54,000 acres of native land (Duwamish Tribe, "Treaty of Point Elliott"; Treaty of Point Elliott). The land covered in the Treaty of Point Elliott includes modern day Seattle, Renton, Tukwila, Bellevue, Mercer Island, White Center and much of King County (Native Land Digital).



Figure 4 Map of White Center with Context

However, the treaty was violated in 1855, sparking indigenous rebellions labeled “the Indian War” from 1855-1858. In 1859, following the violent conflict, the United States Senate formally ratified the Treaty of Point Elliott. A total of five reservations were established by the treaty. However, the rights of the Duwamish under the Treaty of Point Elliott have never been recognized (“Treaty of Point Elliott”).

First Colonizing Settlers Arrive

In 1870, Ed Solomon purchased 319 acres of Duwamish land, including the area that White Center now occupies. After a failed attempt at draining marshy swamps to farm, Solomon gave up and sold the land. Logging became the first business enterprise to bring in revenue to the area in 1887. The emergence of this industry opened up the roads to White Center, and in 1888, small-scale saw and shingle mills were established. Eventually, all of the available timber was harvested and the mills closed. With the available resources extracted, the land was subdivided and sold to newer colonizing settlers. These settlers attempted to farm and raise livestock, amid the stumps and bogs left behind by the logging enterprise, to provide for their families (Richardson). With no existing or enforceable building codes, the housing they constructed was fast and cheap, with some settlers of the time indicating that they “came out to White Center and ‘shacked it up’ in the early days” (Knapp and Peg qtd. in Richardson). This was due, in part, to the community’s status as an unincorporated area of King County.

Build the Roads

The turn of the twentieth century saw more roads built that connected White Center to additional areas in the South Puget Sound. Jacob Ambaum purchased a 20 acre plot of land in 1902 at SW 126th Street. After constructing two miles of his own road, King County stepped in to build the rest, constructing what is today known as Ambaum Blvd SW. Ambaum later worked with some neighbors to construct McKinnon Road from Youngstown to White Center, a road that is now known as Delridge Way SW. In this same period, Oak Park Grocery opened at 16th Avenue SW and SW 107th Street, becoming the first store in White Center (Richardson).

Streetcar Suburb

The improvements made to the roadway system paled in comparison to the construction of the Highland Park and Lake Burien Streetcar Line in 1912. The streetcar was privately funded by local developers, including George White and Hiram Green, running directly through White Center, passing SW Roxbury St along 16th Avenue SW. This transit line reduced travel time to Seattle by two hours, leading to an increase in population and businesses in White Center (Knapp & Young). However, the line was built quickly and without much regulation on bare dirt paths. Months into its first year of operation, a portion of the streetcar line tracks were washed away in a mudslide. This prompted the city of Seattle to purchase the streetcar line for \$1, with the guarantee that the line would be repaired, making it the first municipally owned streetcar line in the Seattle area. In 1916, the second store to ever operate in White Center, dubbed White Center Mercantile, moved from their original location further north in South Seattle to 16th Avenue SW and SW Roxbury Street (Richardson). This intersection would become the locus of White Center's commercial district, and has maintained that status to this day.

World War I

By 1916, WWI was raging in Europe. Domestic wartime manufacturing led to an increase in the population of White Center, due to its proximity to industrial production facilities in the nearby Duwamish River Valley. In response, local developers George White and Hiram Green built an inexpensive supply of residential housing to meet the demand from families who relocated to the area. Green purchased five acres of land in White Center, from 18th Avenue SW to 16th Avenue SW, and from SW Roxbury Street to SW 98th Street. One of the first buildings that Green constructed on this plot of land was the Apothecary House, which included a theater and drug store, at the southwest corner of 16th Avenue SW and SW Roxbury Street (Richardson).

In 1918, George White and Hiram Green had both invested much in the small community of White Center, and ultimately had a difference of opinions on what the name of the booming community would be called. In 1918, the two developers settled the decision with a coin toss. George White won, and from that point forward the community was known as White Center (Knapp & Young).

Without an overarching city government, White Center has relied on private development and personal ingenuity to provide municipal services and resources. In coordination with Sam Metzler, who moved to White Center in 1905, Hiram Green and others started the Mountain View Water Company by connecting to the Seattle Water Supply at 35th Avenue SW (Knapp & Young). As for power, local historian Clarence Gresset shared this account of local White Center residents communal efforts to secure power from Seattle City Light:

"In 1922 neighbors had been waiting for [Seattle] City Light services. They were informed that the firm of Stone and Webster had instigated an injunction against Seattle City Light's further extension of service beyond the city limits. White Center citizens were equal to the occasion. They noted that the injunction was not immediately effective. So they all stayed home from work for a day. They dug post holes, felled and trimmed poles, set them and strung wires. That same day they called [Seattle] City Light for a hookup. They got their lights ahead of the [injunction] deadline." (Gresset qtd. in Richardson).

Prohibition Era

Another facet of being unincorporated was the fact that White Center fell outside of Seattle law enforcement's jurisdiction, which provided a unique opportunity for the community during the Prohibition years (1916-1933). Evidence of bootlegging and smuggling has been found in White

Center and surrounding areas, including a poorly constructed tunnel system that ran from SW Roxbury Street to SW 100th Street. There were a number of businesses along 16th Avenue SW that burned down in the latter half of the twentieth century, prompting a White Center fire inspector Russ Pritchard to comment, “I hope I retire before White Center burns down.” Once Prohibition was repealed, a plethora of taverns and clubs were established in White Center. They opened early and stayed open late, not restricted by the closing times enforced by the city of Seattle (Richardson).

Around the end of Prohibition, the city of Seattle officially closed the Highland Park and Lake Burien Streetcar line, after a winter landslide once again took out a portion of the rail lines. The next year, in 1934, a blinker light was installed in White Center, signaling a shift in the transportation priorities of the area (Richardson).

Another of Hiram Green’s business enterprises on the 16th Avenue SW commercial district in White Center was the White Center Boxing Arena. It hosted boxing matches through the mid-1930s, and then reopened as the Southgate Rollerdom in 1937. This skate center was a social and recreational gathering space for the White Center community, closing its doors in 2006. It has since reopened under new ownership (Richardson).

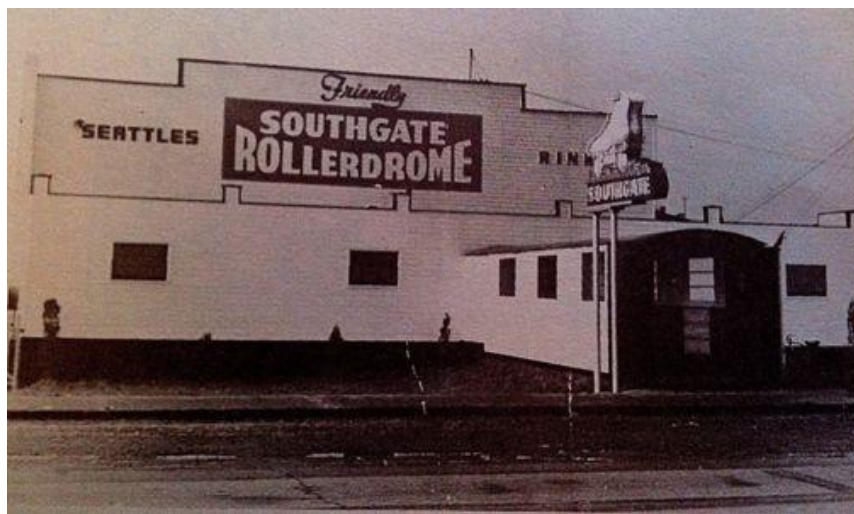


Figure 5 (Southwest Seattle Historical Society, Used without permission)

World War II

The onset of the United State's involvement in WWII resulted in a population boom in White Center, drawing families from the Depression stricken midwest to the wartime production lines in the Duwamish River Valley. The Puget Sound region was not prepared for this massive influx of people, to the point that White Center residents were renting out attics, basements, and even chicken coops to newcomers. In response, the federal government constructed 569 units of temporary housing at White Center Heights in 1943 for the wartime workers. The increased population catalyzed economic growth in the area, with White Center opening its first post office near the commercial district, and its first bank in 1944. At this time, the commercial core of White Center began to offer after-hours entertainment and social activities to the war workers and soldiers passing through the region (Richardson).

In 1941, independent public schools in the area joined together to form the Highline School District. This district went on to open 27 schools in response to the increasing wartime population, seven of which were opened in White Center (Richardson).

Rat City

During this wartime period, White Center garnered a new moniker: Rat City. There are a number of theories as to where this name came from. One is that the local wartime military establishment was named the Reserve Army Training Center, or the Recruitment and Training Center. Another potential source of the name was that the military often designated some places as out-of-bounds for servicemen, calling these zones Restricted Alcohol Territory. Regardless of the origin, residents of White Center quickly adopted the moniker as their own amid the war effort. Its

lasting power is reflected in the Rat City Roller Derby team that calls White Center home today (Richardson).

Post-war Era Migration

In the post-war era, community leaders established a number of organizations and initiatives in White Center, with the hopes of bringing order to an area of King County that was considered by many outsiders to be lawless, and was described as “rough and tumble, edgy, ‘an active place.’” These organizations included the White Center Library, a sewer district, the White Center Chamber of Commerce, White Center Boys Club, a Salvation Army Youth Center, and an Open Housing Initiative for minorities. In the 1950s and 60s, White Center’s commercial hub at 16th Avenue SW and SW Roxbury Street included more than 70 businesses along just two blocks of 16th Avenue SW (Richardson).

Beginning in the 1970s, White Center received another population influx, in the form of refugees and immigrants from a variety of cultural backgrounds who settled in White Center. Amid the fallout of the Vietnam War in 1975, 30,000 Vietnamese refugees immigrated to Washington State, with many of these people settling in White Center (Banel, “Refugee, Immigration Controversy”). Another wave of Khmer refugees settled in White Center in the 1980s, fleeing the Cambodian genocide executed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Cheam). During this same period, Central Americans fleeing violence in their home countries immigrated to White Center. Two of these immigrants from El Salvador opened their own bakery, still a stanchion of the community today (Watanabe).

By the 1990s, the WWII era housing structures for war worker families had become low-income housing, and they were in disrepair. Investments were secured from the federal government to

redevelop and refurbish the dilapidated housing units. The new development, dubbed Greenbridge, was constructed to house a mix of incomes, with 60% of residents having lived in White Center prior to redevelopment. In the following years, the White Center Early Learning Initiative opened the Educare Early Learning Center in the Greenbridge community (Daigle).

Concurrently, community leaders were concerned about the educational and economic trends in White Center, characterized by the closure of businesses and loss of jobs in the area. This concern led to the creation of the White Center Community Development Association (WCCDA), a non-profit dedicated to addressing a variety of issues that affect the quality of life in White Center. In 2007, this mission expanded to have the WCCDA act as a neighborhood intermediary on behalf of the community.

LGBTQ Presence in White Center

In the present day, White Center is experiencing a new facet of migration and settlement, in the form of queer people moving to the area, seeking housing that they can afford and a place where they can build community.

In 2009, the United Territories of Pacific Islanders Alliance (UTOPIA) Washington began operating in the south Puget Sound. They are a “queer and trans people of color-led grassroots organization born out of the struggles, challenges, strength, and resilience of the Queer and Trans Pacific Islander (QTPI) community in South King County.” The creation of this organization highlights the concentration of, at the very least, a QTPI community in South King County (UTOPIA Washington). Prior to this organization’s inception, the queer community did not have an organizational level voice in the White Center community. There are instances and traditions

within indigenous cultures that resemble modern queerness in the form of two-spirit or indigiqueer people. However, the presence of queer people is unseen in historical accounts.

While UTOPIA is the first organization formed towards the betterment of members of the LGBTQ community in South King County, the opening of a new skate rink marked the first instance of a publicly queer-oriented business opening in White Center. Southgate Roller Rink began operations in 2011 out of the former boxing arena/Southgate Rollerdom. The year prior, a roller rink in Bellevue ended their decades long Gay Skate night. The new owners of Southgate Roller Rink saw an opportunity to pick up the mantle of holding a skate night oriented towards the LGBTQ community. They launched Pride Skate Night in October 2011, to be more inclusive of the multiplicity of queer identities that exist (Schwarz).

This monthly event became the closest LGBTQ skate night to the Capitol Hill gayborhood in Seattle, and brought many queer people to White Center from the broader Puget Sound region for the first time. An interviewee of mine had this to say about their experience with moving to White Center and the role that Southgate Roller Rink played in that decision:

“I had a friend who lived in White Center, and he got me to come down from Eastlake, which is where I lived. He got me to come out for Pride Skate at Southgate Roller Rink in White Center, and it was my first time to go to White Center.”

Prior to the launch of Pride Skate Night, from 2000-2012, Seattle’s preeminent gayborhood on Capitol Hill experienced a declining percentage of same-sex households (Balk, “Map”). This period in time is associated with an increase in jobs in the tech industry and subsequent increasing rental prices in the gayborhood, and Seattle overall. Jeff Hennes, founder of Seattle Men in Leather, described these changes:

“People have been moving off the Hill. We used to joke that you became a couple and you’d move to Queen Anne. Wallingford was Lesbians. Well, Wallingford and West Seattle. Nowadays, everywhere. [LGBTQ people] truly are everywhere. We can’t afford to live on the Hill anymore.” (IN Close, “There Goes the Gayborhood”).

Some of the people leaving Capitol Hill settled in White Center. Among them were Nathan Adams and his husband, who moved to White Center in 2012 and, seeing an opportunity, shortly thereafter began the process of opening a bar for the burgeoning queer community living in the south Puget Sound region. They entertained a variety of options in the SoDo and Capitol Hill neighborhoods, but ultimately decided to locate the Lumberyard Bar next door to Southgate Roller Rink on 16th Avenue SW south of SW Roxbury Street, in White Center’s commercial district. When they opened in January 2017, they became the first LGBTQ oriented bar in White Center. Southgate’s monthly Pride Skate Night was a reassuring sign that providing a space for queer people in White Center would be a lucrative business opportunity (IN Close).

Once an LGBTQ oriented bar opened in White Center, local media started to take notice. KCTS9, a PBS affiliate in Seattle, made a video in 2018 detailing the trend of shifting queer geographies in Seattle. This video included a highlight of the Lumberyard Bar and Pride Skate Night, and featured Nathan Adams discussing the development of queer community in White Center:

“The roller rink...they do [pride] skate the first Wednesday of every month. And it’s huge. They’re always packed, they always sell out. It’s a truly diverse population. I think that’s what makes Rat City, White Center the next sort of...I don’t wanna say gayborhood, but it’s developing its own identity.” (IN Close).

A few months later, the Seattle Times published an article spotlighting new bars opening in White Center, including the Lumberyard Bar. Nearly a year later in May 2019, local news organization

The Stranger published an article titled “White Center Keeps Getting Gay.” Author Chase Burns described a busy weekend night out in White Center’s LGBTQ oriented establishments. At this point, the Lumberyard Bar had been open for more than a year, and had a fellow queer bar open across the street called The Swallow. Burns shared some perspective regarding the demographic changes on Capitol Hill, and the potential impacts a burgeoning LGBTQ nightlife scene might have on White Center:

“After successfully gentrifying Capitol Hill and turning it into a bedroom community for Amazon elites, the gays have set their sights on White Center. I had this thought when I first visited Lumber Yard Bar during its opening in January 2018, but it became even more clear this weekend.” (Burns).

This article was a precursor to major developments in the organization of White Center’s LGBTQ community. Less than one month later, White Center’s LGBTQ community held its first pride event, organized on facebook by two gay men who had recently moved to White Center and found community in the social LGBTQ bar scene. On June 5th, 2019 they kicked off the festivities with a pride flag raising at Triangle Park, located at the intersection of SW Roxbury Street, 16th Avenue SW, and Delridge Way SW. Ironically, this park is within Seattle’s city limits, and so technically is not part of White Center. In the same month, the WCCDA hired a new staff member to administer their LGBTQ outreach strategy, including the administration of an LGBTQ Youth Leadership program.

The organizers of White Center Pride experienced a supportive reaction from the community following their first White Center Pride event. By the end of 2019, they formally incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit charitable corporation with the state of Washington. The White Center Pride Committee states in their corporate filings that the nature of their business is “to strengthen the

LGBTQ community in White Center, Washington” (Washington Corporations and Charities Filing System).

Recent Development in White Center

The community of White Center has expressed concerns over gentrification and change since the late 2010s. The Seattle metropolitan area has faced increasing housing prices that have pushed residents out of the city to find more affordable housing (Long). White Center has historically been home to low-income housing developments and relatively affordable house prices. As housing prices in the surrounding region have increased, aspiring homeowners and developers have found an interest in the unincorporated community, leading to a commensurate increase in housing prices in White Center. From 2012 to June 2022, the average home price in White Center increased from around \$160,000 to a high of around \$622,000, an increase of almost 388% in roughly 10 years. This increase in home prices has been accompanied by an increase in housing construction in White Center of all types, including townhomes and apartment buildings.

Along with housing construction, there has been a trend of new businesses opening up in the central business district. Many new restaurants and bars opened, including Biscuit Bitch, Tim’s Tavern, Bok-a-Bok, Lil’ Woody’s, and Dottie’s Double Wide (Guarente, “Seattle’s Most Irreverent Biscuit Shop”; Vinh; Hill). There have also been impending plans announced for a new Unicorn location to open, a bar that has been thriving on Capitol Hill. However, the COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the business community, as it did in other communities across the country and around the world. As a result, Biscuit Bitch closed their relatively new location in White Center, Unicorn’s opening has been indefinitely delayed, and former queer bar The Swallow has closed as well (Guarente “Popular Comfort Food”; Robinson; Baume).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some businesses have rebounded, and new businesses have opened in White Center. One of these businesses, TOMO, is a new restaurant from former head chef of Canlis, Brady Ishiwata Williams (Vermillion). The clientele is similar to Seattle's upscale restaurant Canlis, with reservations requiring a \$45 per person deposit. The opening is indicative of the vibe shift that is occurring in White Center.

Another indication of White Center's future is the expansion of transit connections to the region. King County Metro's (Metro) RapidRide H Line began operations on March 18, 2023. This new transit route replaced Bus Route 120, formerly one of Metro's busiest routes. The line provides direct transit service between Downtown Seattle and Burien Transit Center, running through White Center parallel to 16th Avenue SW (King County Metro). This resembles the path of the former Highland Park and Lake Burien Streetcar Line.

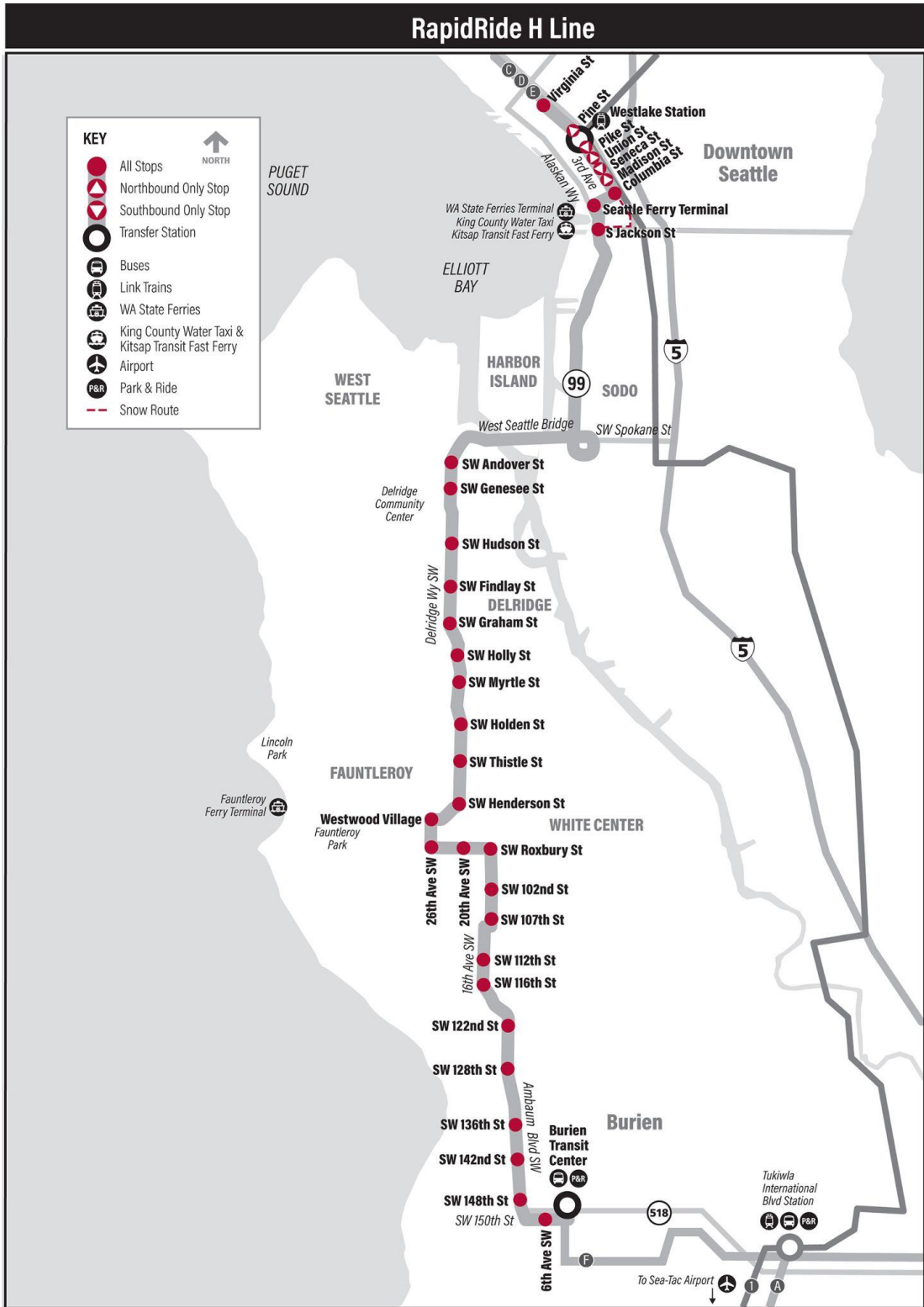


Figure 6 (RapidRide H Line Route Map, King County Metro. Used without permission)

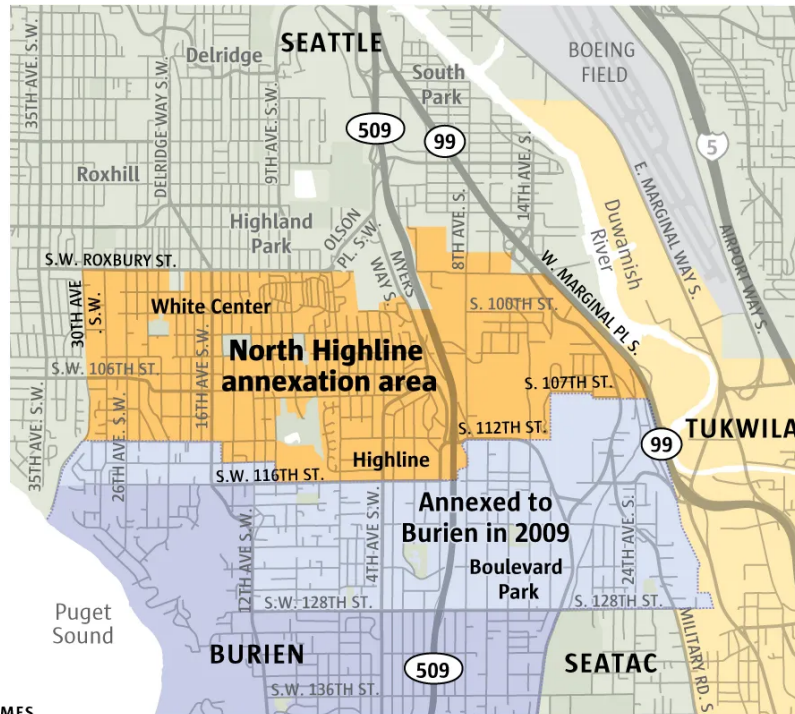
Annexation

First adopted in 1990, Washington's Growth Management Act identifies cities as the "most appropriate" level of local government to provide urban services (RCW 36.70A.110(4)).

Additionally, King County's Comprehensive Plan and Countywide Planning Policies encourage the annexation of unincorporated areas that are already urbanized. These places are identified as Potential Annexation Areas (PAAs) and are affiliated with a city for future annexation. In 2009, voters in a southern portion of White Center voted in the affirmative to be annexed by the city of Burien (Schaeffer). At the same time, then Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels attempted to annex the remaining portion of North Highline, which includes White Center, but was denied by the Seattle City Council. In 2012, the city of Burien attempted to annex the rest of the North Highline area, but voters rejected the proposal. Then, in 2016, the Washington State Legislature approved to redirect \$7 million in state sales taxes to Seattle each year for six years, if the city annexed the North Highline area, which includes the remaining portion of unincorporated White Center (Beckman).

Seattle's planned annexation of White Center

The Legislature has voted to give Seattle the tax help city officials want to annex White Center and neighboring communities in North Highline, an unincorporated part of King County.



Sources: Esri, King County
MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Figure 7 (The Seattle Times, 2016. Used without permission)

Ultimately, the North Highline annexation area remains unincorporated. As of 2022, the city of Seattle has received approval from the King County Boundary Review Board to call for a public vote on the question of annexation (Mayne). However, no timeline has been made clear as to when that vote may take place.

Arson

Historically, White Center's commercial center along 16th Avenue SW has documented fires that damaged buildings and shuttered businesses, made worse by a lack of enforceable fire and building construction codes. A former White Center fire inspector was quoted as saying "I hope I retire before White Center burns down." Unfortunately, in July 2021, that historical pattern repeated itself with an act of arson against the Lumberyard Bar (Zhou). This act of violence against the first queer bar to open in White Center has had ramifications for the community. Mexican grocer La Tipica Oaxaqueña, Dottie's Double Wide, and a boba store under construction

were neighboring businesses damaged by the fire. In the wake of this act of arson, the Lumberyard Bar reached their gofundme recovery fundraising goal of \$100,000 within days, while La Tipica Oaxaqueña's gofundme only received \$16,329 of their \$50,000 fundraising goal as of August 2023.

The Lumberyard Bar was able to reopen in a new, bigger location across from their old location on 16th Avenue SW. And in spite of their comparative lack in fundraising, La Tipica Oaxaqueña has reopened as well.

Chapter 5 - Analysis

There are several themes and trends that have shaped White Center as it stands today.

These include White Center's urban context, gentrification, and the community ties.

These trends explain how White Center has changed, and provide a roadmap through which to better understand White Center's future. My analysis aims to place the recent changes that White Center has experienced, and that continue to shape the community, into the greater narrative of White Center's history and identity. I want to understand how White Center has changed over time, and how further change could impact the future of the community.

Additionally, I'm using my analysis to answer the questions I raised in my review of the literature. I want to assess the impact that planning policies in Seattle impact the queer community, how the changes in Capitol Hill have impacted the gayborhood, if there exists a multiplicity of queer space in the Puget Sound, and what implications interconnected queer space across municipal boundaries might have for the planning profession.

Questions:

This analysis is oriented around my research questions, which are "How has White Center changed in recent years? How might White Center continue to change in the near future?"

The geographic plateau on which White Center is located is the ancestral domain of the Duwamish. Along with several other Coast Salish tribes, the Duwamish signed over this land to the U.S. Government in exchange for certain rights and guarantees, as agreed upon by the Treaty of Point Elliott. However, the rights guaranteed to these indigenous tribes have never been recognized for the Duwamish. Following that betrayal, the landscape was irrevocably altered to extract resources and generate capital for the settler colonists who purchased this land from the federal government. This historical context has important implications for the recent changes that White Center has experienced related to gentrification, and the looming changes that have yet to materialize.

The following analysis of the story of White Center is informed by the framing of media narratives related to White Center, my own research into the literature on queer space in the built environment, and the personal perspectives of key informants that I interviewed from White Center's LGBTQ community. I focus primarily on the period of time from the 1970s through to the present day. By that point, White Center's foundational infrastructure, in the form of roads and urban services, had been secured by previous residents and developers. The 1970s also marked the beginning of a period of migration to White Center by refugees and immigrants seeking security and safety in community with one another. The diversity of people living in White Center today is a direct result of that migration.

White Center's Urban Context

White Center's reputation is rooted in its distance from Seattle City Hall, both in terms of physical distance and legal separation as an unincorporated community. However, the

specific location that White Center occupies has recently become more lucrative, as the regional context informing personal location decisions has changed. This change in the potential future of White Center follows a trend of the fortunes of White Center shifting based on outside influences. Formerly, those influences were predominantly workers moving to the region to staff wartime industrial operations in the nearby Duwamish River basin. Now, the housing crisis in Seattle and the state of Washington is forcing people to search broadly for affordable housing. White Center is an enticing location given its proximity to Seattle and the rest of the South Puget Sound, its central commercial business strip, and the newest investment in public transit connections by King County Metro.

Location in the Puget Sound and Urban Built Form

White Center's location relative to the Puget Sound and urbanized central commercial district add to the desirability of the neighborhood. White Center is situated just south of Seattle, sandwiched between Burien and West Seattle, with relatively easy access to both Seattle and the South Puget Sound.

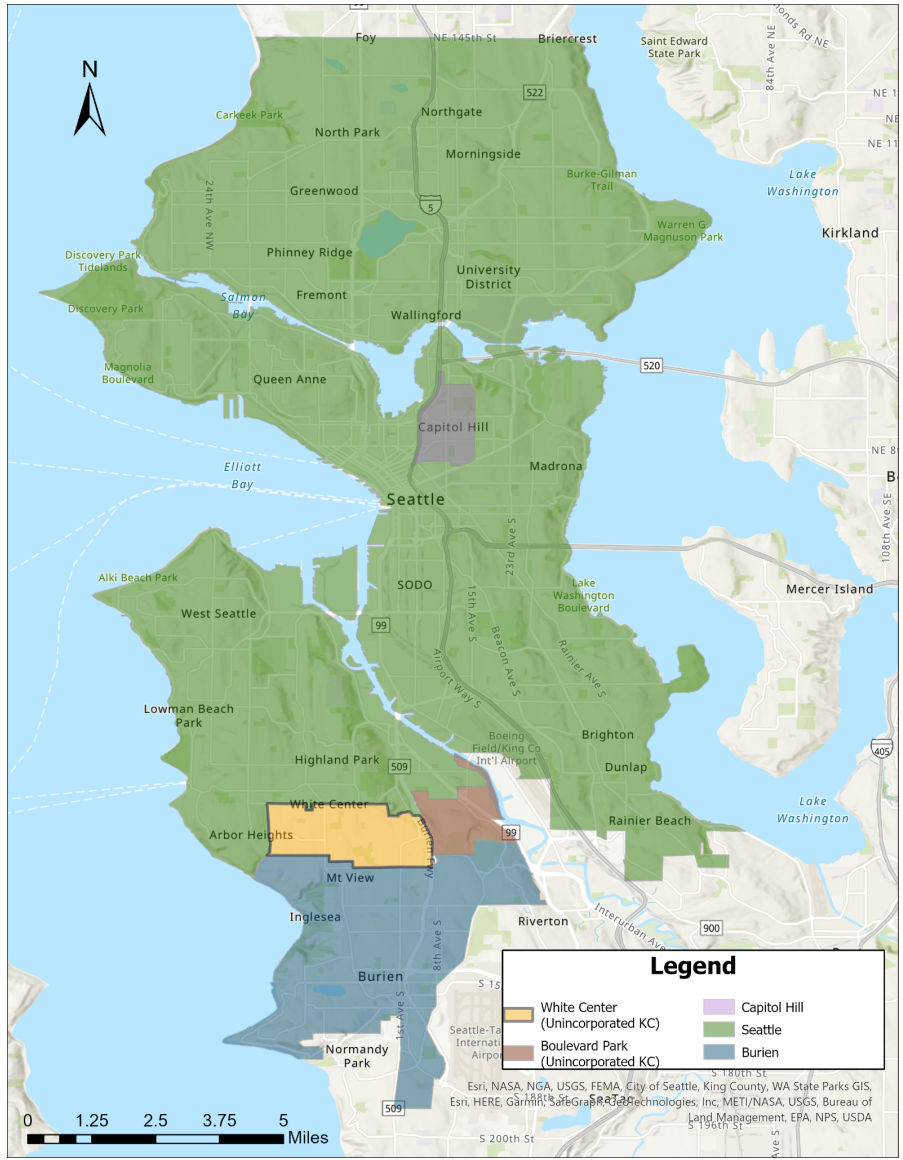


Figure 8 Map of White Center with Context

The urban core at SW Roxbury St. and 16th Ave SW is a focal point for the community to gather, with ample parking and a relatively high level of localized walkability for a mostly suburban community.

“I was kinda living [with a friend in White Center]. I was watching the market and found something within walking distance...2 blocks from him, 2 blocks from downtown [White Center]...just kind of exactly what I was looking for.”

One of my key informants shared their experience deciding where to buy, citing White Center's proximity to downtown Seattle and commercial urban core as beneficial amenities that informed their final decision to purchase a home. They saw the potential for the community in the future, as it would become subject to development and welcome new residents.

"We were like, 'yeah, this place is gonna hit in a few more years, because it's really close to downtown [Seattle] and it has this little urban core.' I was like, 'this neighborhood is obviously going to be on its way sometime soon.' We just thought, 'I bet this neighborhood will eventually have some fun places to go to.' And that is what happened. That's how we ended up here."

Many of the people that I spoke with indicated that White Center was central to a variety of different aspects of their lives. Multiple people that I spoke with cited close proximity to their job as a reason for moving to and/or remaining in White Center.

Transportation connections

Prior to the installation of the road network, it was difficult to travel to the White Center plateau. The natural geography was leveraged in the early days of colonization to easily transport logs by sliding them down the sloping topography to the Sound. The installation of the Highland Park and Lake Burien Streetcar in 1912 was a game changer in terms of White Center's connection to Seattle, greatly reducing the travel time and effort required to move throughout the West Seattle peninsula. At the time, travel to Seattle from White Center was reduced to 2 hours. Today, King County's new RapidRide H Line has improved upon the transit connection between Seattle and White Center, replacing the former King County Metro 120 bus route, one of KC Metro's busiest routes. Now, travel between White Center and Seattle is timed at 30 minutes via public transit, which increases its desirability for people who are looking to leave Seattle for more affordable

housing. One interviewee shared that they enjoyed the ease of access to surrounding communities in the south Puget Sound and West Seattle, stating specifically that relatively easy access to freeways informed their decision to move to White Center. While the Seattle Freeze could be a factor in this dynamic, I believe that the bigger factor is the development of housing and investment in properties in White Center, which is leading to gentrification and displacement. White Center is a melting pot of different cultures, who largely came to this region under difficult circumstances, and built a supportive and collaborative community. The WCCDA is a prime example of how this community has been able to garner additional support for its residents, in spite of lacking a more robust local government.

Gentrification

Gentrification is a phenomenon wherein investments are made in neighborhoods that have relatively affordable properties when compared to adjacent districts in a housing market. These investments are often developers with capital purchasing outdated or dilapidated properties, redeveloping them with townhomes or apartment complexes. In conjunction with an increase in the housing supply is a shift in demographics caused by prohibitive increases in the cost of housing. An increase in housing supply is usually good, and economically could result in lower housing costs. However, the current regional and national deficits in housing supply are preventing the relief that one might expect economically from rising housing costs. Additionally, increasing costs of materials and labor commensurate in housing construction are reflected in housing prices, which exacerbate the gentrification cycle.

While it's hard to exactly pin down when, White Center has been experiencing gentrification for at least a few years. In 2017, a student writer for White Center Blog laid out in plain terms that his community was experiencing gentrification.

“As I sit on the bus, riding my way through White Center, it’s slowly become easier and easier to see changes happening around me. New buildings, new restaurants and new stores seem to be popping up faster than I have time to count them. The actual level of change happening hadn’t fully dawned on me until I heard an old woman casually remark ‘Welcome to the new Rat City, a hipster’s dream’” (Otto, “Welcome”).

One of my interviewees, a white lesbian woman who moved to White Center with her partner in 2004, described the gentrification that she’s experienced:

“[O]wners are selling off...falling apart houses...because elderly folks who live there have died, or you know whatever reason. And then, developers just come in, bulldoze those houses and put 3 houses on that lot. There's a lot of that going on right now. On the one hand, it's obviously nice to have density. On the other hand, they just look weird. So that's what's happening.”

The recent influx of new residents to White Center, whether renter or owner, has raised some questions about their relationship with the existing community in White Center. My key informants in the White Center LGBTQ community have expressed that there exists a gap in communication, engagement, and understanding between the burgeoning queer community and the long-standing White Center residents. One of my interviewees grew up in White Center and expressed feeling a disconnect between these two communities.

“It feels like there's a bubble between like these White businesses [new to White Center] versus the BIPOC businesses, because a lot of the community members that still live in White Center are, you know...very uncomfortable. Their first language is not English, so they get very hesitant to explore anything that's outside of a Cambodian business or Vietnamese restaurant. Things like that...it's almost like they're creating a different community outside of what historically has been what made White Center, White Center.”

The sentiment that there is a “bubble” or gap between the two communities is not unique to his experience, informed by growing up in White Center. Several interviewees from White Center’s queer community shared a similar understanding of the relations between the two communities.

“So that’s [the White Center LGBTQ] community I’m in. There’s also definitely the community of people that have been here, and are from here, which is a different thing, too.”

“There are different ethnic backgrounds [in White Center], but they’re pretty siloed.”

“Currently, a lot of queer folks [in White Center] are families, or a couple who’s a little bit older and bought their first property, or people who have been here a really long time, and a whole gamut in between.”

“When I was at Búho [for a White Center Pride happy hour fundraising event], it was totally lit up. You know we had drag queens. Lots of LGBTQ that were in the space for that evening. I’ve been to Búho on a non-pride event, and it’s a totally different scene.”

This is not just a function of members of the well established, diverse community not speaking English as a primary language. One interviewee shared some anecdotes from his life, wherein he elucidates that some of his mutual White Center LGBTQ community members seem to only patronize White Center businesses that have hosted White Center Pride happy hour events.

“There’s still [LGBTQ] folks that may not necessarily feel comfortable stepping into these other businesses downtown unless there was a pride event there, or there was something organized to introduce them to it. I say this because I have friends who are like: ‘I’m tired of eating at the restaurants in White Center,’ and I’m just like ‘what have you [had]? You know this one?’ And he’s like ‘No.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, how can you say you’re tired of what White Center restaurants would have to offer if you haven’t tried the ones outside of the ones that we haven’t done a happy hour event at or that doesn’t have like some sort of pride event going on?’”

Members of each community acknowledge that there is not a bridge to close this gap, but some know of attempts to build one.

“There's no bridge that's being built to kind of connect the community, the older community of White Center to...the newer folks who are coming in.”

“I feel that White Center Pride is crossing these boundaries by hosting different events at these different locations. They're weaving this greater web or fabric to have more of a close knit community. I don't see anyone [else] taking on the onus to try to bridge these gaps between the separate siloed communities.”

The “Seattle Freeze”

The Seattle Freeze is a phenomenon that has been well documented, if well defined.

Essentially, there is a culture in Seattle to stick with your own crowd in such a way that it is difficult to break into new social circles (Sommerfeld, “Our”). However, one of my interviewees, a longtime resident of White Center, had this to say on the Seattle Freeze:

“I first moved here from San Francisco. Then I found...the Seattle freeze. I felt like it was very real trying to get into social circles and stuff, and [White Center was] more than welcoming. I sort of like to refer to [White Center] sometimes as the Island of Misfit toys. It is definitely not like any other neighborhood in Seattle at all. Definitely friendlier and more outgoing and more joined together.”

On top of the cultural differences and language barriers in White Center, I believe that this social phenomenon in the Seattle region is perpetuating this disconnect between the two communities, in spite of the efforts to bridge that gap.

Rising cost of housing

White Center has historically been an affordable place to live.

“White Center always tended to be a little bit on the cheaper side of things, because it's on the outskirts, and it's unincorporated. That trend is over. I'm pretty sure.”

While Interviewee 8 considers White Center's period as affordable to be over, the ability to purchase a home was a common consideration of each interviewee's reasons for moving to White Center and the surrounding areas. Of the 10 people interviewed, 7 are homeowners that sought to purchase a home, who found the prices near White Center within their ideal budget.

"I was looking to buy. Obviously it was more affordable out here than places up on Capitol Hill. I certainly get more for my money."

One interviewee, who is a renter, expressed a desire to purchase a home in the future, ideally in White Center or nearby.

"...[I'm] looking at house prices, because I ultimately do want to purchase [in White Center], they do seem stable. I don't know, I'm pretty sure it has to do with the economy, but I don't feel that the cost to purchase will change anytime soon and I do see businesses opening or being beautified."

Even as queer people who move to White Center are able to purchase a home, housing is becoming less affordable for some who live in White Center as property values increase.

"But I think that [an increasing White population] comes [at a] hefty price, because I think that the price becomes rent increases or like the AMI (Area Median Income) increases, or property taxes increase. So, when you have these people who are coming into White Center with great jobs...it kind of forces that part of displacement where now these BIPOC families that live here can no longer afford [rent] when it's time to renew, or when it's that time for the annual [Section 8 housing certification]."

Community

Through my interviews, I learned that the recent increase in prominence of the LGBTQ community in White Center was a surprise to long term residents of the community.

"So when I go back to White Center, I'm just in shock at all of the changes that have been made. But particularly within the LGBTQ+ community, because a lot of the things that are there now didn't exist when I [grew up] there, like the gay bars. White Center Pride was a brand new thing to me that I never knew existed before I had left, and I guess it started after I left...it's so beautiful to see things

like White Center Pride happen in White Center, because...in my mind, I just never thought that would ever fucking happen in my life.”

“It is pretty clear now. It did not used to be [a queer space], and it is now, and I think it's getting known now in that way which I didn't. I also didn't really know it was true. Someone said it the other day I met someone who lived somewhere else in the county, and they asked where I lived, and I told them [White Center], and they were like, ‘oh, yeah, where all the queer people live.’ And I was like, ‘what is that? We all live now? I don't think I know that.’”

The growing LGBTQ community of White Center is expansive, encompassing queer people who primarily socialize in White Center, but don't necessarily live in White Center. This community includes people, businesses, and organizations that are active in building community among queer people in White Center. These active efforts support existing queer communities while also introducing new queer people to White Center. Some of these new arrivals to White Center have experienced a broadly welcoming community that offers a variety of local businesses and restaurants to patronize in a central urban location. These aspects of the community were considerations that informed the relocation of some of my interviewees to the White Center area.

Homophily

Homophily, understood colloquially as “birds of a feather flock together,” was a unifying thread touched on by each interviewee. This included both members of the newly prominent LGBTQ community in White Center, as well as the pre-existing community of White Center.

One of my interviewees, a gay Cambodian man who grew up in White Center, shared that his family moved when he was very young to be closer to the Cambodian community in White Center.

“We first lived in South Park before we moved to White Center. The biggest reason why was because at that time there was a growing population of Cambodian people that were immigrating to White Center, and my mother wanted to be a part of that so that she could be around other Cambodian people.”

Many of my other interviewees shared that they learned of White Center through a variety of sources in the queer community.

“I first found out about [White Center as a place where queer people formed community] when the Lumber Yard burned down. Seeing the rallying support to bring the [Lumber Yard] bar back instilled my faith in that community and that it was welcoming.”

“I had a friend who lived in White Center, and he got me to come down from Eastlake, which is where I lived. He got me to come out for Pride Skate at Southgate Roller Rink in White Center, and it was my first time to go to White Center.”

“I think it was very clear that both visually in the streetscape, but also through conversation with other queer people, that a lot of queer people were moving here. Also to the Burien area, also to other parts of South Seattle, South Sound.”

“I had started [attending White Center Pride events] before I actually moved [to South King County]. Going to these events was a major [factor in my] decision to move out of Eastlake, the inner core area of Seattle to the south.”

Homophily is a powerful force that facilitates the creation of queer space within the built environment, as queer people desire to build community. In tandem with other considerations, it can be a strong influential factor in personal location decisions of queer people.

“I have a few very good friends that live in the White Center area. And we hang out...you know...often, 5 days out of the week. [At first,] it was my one friend...but then 2 others that eventually moved down to White Center from Capitol Hill. Same kind of situation where they decided to move out and buy down here.”

Homophily can also be a reaction to a feeling of loss of community in historically queer neighborhoods and spaces. Interviewee 3 shared their experience watching residents of queer neighborhoods seek assimilation to broader society, until they realize that they have lost something once they no longer have the community that they abandoned.

“...as you move towards assimilation, there's this feeling that you don't need queer specific space anymore. And then it turns out that that's wrong, and you do need queer specific space. And I watch this sort of thing happen in neighborhoods, and just even with people I know...”

Interviewee 9 lives in Burien and considers White Center to be the center of their social life, where all of their friends live.

“I have a large concentration of friends that live in White Center. I think I have one friend that lives here in Burien, but we always meet up together in White Center. It is a focal point for community gatherings. That's where I go.”

White Center Community

Non-queer White Center Residents

Proximity to community was another factor for folks settling in White Center. The Cambodian and Vietnamese communities that formed in White Center have provided support and familiarity to other Vietnamese and Cambodian people in the region. One of my interviewees grew up in White Center and surrounding areas. He shared that his family moved to White Center to be closer to the Cambodian community in White Center. Proximity to the LGBTQ community that has gained prominence in White Center has been a factor for many of the people that I spoke with, who cited their connections to LGBTQ people and community building activities as a factor in their decision to move to White Center. Additionally, the access to local businesses and restaurants was noted as a factor in many interviewees decisions to locate in White Center. Specifically, they noted

the diversity of the restaurants, providing a high quality of Vietnamese, Salvadorian, and Mexican food compared to what is available in Seattle.

Welcoming

A number of my interviewees expressed that they felt welcomed by the entire community in White Center, not just from other queer people in White Center, which reinforced the desirability of living in White Center.

“I went to a block party at the end of the summer, and it felt like what Capitol Hill was described to me [as] in the 90s and 80s. It felt like a welcoming mat, seeing the gay representation, not just in the people who were there as customers but [also the] businesses.”

“There's a strong straight contingent here among the bars and restaurants. They are all very friendly and welcoming.”

“I know Nathan, who owns and runs the Lumberyard , and he's super nice and always super welcoming.”

“I first found out about [White Center as a place where queer people formed community] when the Lumber Yard burned down. Seeing the rallying support to bring the [Lumber Yard] bar back instilled my faith in that community and that it was welcoming.”

“I think, what you described as the rise of awareness of this as a queer area, or a gayborhood, could only happen if this felt like a welcoming place to diversity. White Center is one of the most socioeconomically diverse and racially diverse areas in the Seattle Sound area. There's always conflict, but it's really hard to not create more openness around diversity, if you already have it. At least that's my perspective.”

“I feel like the changes have happened in a way where they're bringing in [people]. They're not exclusionary. The things that are coming into the neighborhood feel like they're providing benefits for lots of people and feel welcoming to lots of people.”

Diversity

This diverse community has come to define White Center as one of the most diverse areas in King County, comprising 65% non-white residents and 35% of residents born outside of the United States.

Many of those interviewed expressed support for the diversity of businesses and people that call White Center home. They benefit from the diversity of the neighborhood, which manifests in a variety of restaurants and businesses serving the needs of the Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Latino segments of the community. Interviewee 7 shared the following:

“...I benefit a lot from that diversity like the Mexican, Salvadoran and other kinds of Latinx food here. White Center is the best in the Seattle area. Nothing I've had anywhere else in the Seattle area can compare because the community is so much stronger here. That's just one way I benefit as a non-community member, from their strong presence. People benefit in so many ways other than that.”

When asked about what they see when they think of the White Center community,

Interviewee 6 shared this perspective:

“I see a very diverse community. Diverse culturally. You have some very wealthy people who live in the neighborhood. You have people who barely make ends meet, who live in the neighborhood. There are so many languages spoken in this neighborhood, and so many cultures. It all reflects in the neighborhood itself, just within the different businesses that are opening up the variety. Well, we used to have a little bit more variety in food, but the different restaurants that were around closed.”

However, awareness of this diversity is not enough to assuage concerns about the displacement of the diverse communities that have called White Center home.

Interviewee 5 shared this perspective about the future of White Center's diversity:

“I think having more people come into the neighborhood is a good thing, because it does allow for people to flourish in ways. But we're still a pretty diverse community, and I worry...that people are going to be pushed out and we're not going to be able to have the small Chinese herbal shop anymore, or things like that. I'm afraid that there's gonna be big restaurant people and big money people coming into the neighborhood that will essentially try to push that out. I'm really hoping that we as a community can work together to make sure that stays the same...I feel very conflicted about the whole thing. I'm happy to see more people

come into our neighborhood and see what we have here, and you know we have incredible food and incredible people that are around here all the time, and the people that are here are invested in being here. So I think that that's a great thing, of people coming in to see all of that, and see what this [place] has to offer."

LGBTQ Community

Capitol Hill: The Gayborhood's Plateau

As with other gayborhoods that formed and gained prominence in the wake of the Stonewall riots throughout the United States, Capitol Hill has reached a plateau in its development as a central queer space in the Puget Sound region. In 2014, Gene Balk with the Seattle Times detailed that from 2000-2012, the percentage of same-sex households in the city of Seattle increased by 52%, while the percentage of same-sex households in the Capitol Hill neighborhood dropped by 23% (Balk, 2014). Balk's article includes the story of a gay couple that decided to sell their Capitol Hill condo to move to the Central District, who believed there might be more gay people in their new neighborhood than their old neighborhood (Balk, 2014). This phenomenon of queer people leaving the gayborhood follows the trend of cultural archipelagos of queer space forming in metropolitan areas across the country. In Chicago, Ghaziani studied two instances of queer space, namely Boystown and Andersonville. The study of gayborhoods has shown that queer space is constantly shifting, because of external economic and social factors. In Seattle, queer spaces are being formed in neighborhoods across the city. A relatively accessible metric to track this phenomenon is the opening of a queer oriented bar or event space. Some examples include Dragster in Fremont, Changes Bar & Grill in Wallingford, and the Clock-Out Lounge on Beacon Hill.

This notion of a gayborhood reaching a plateau is a response to the false media narratives that gayborhoods are on the decline, and hint at the reality of the multiplicity of queer space in urban settings. Gayborhoods persist, because of institutional anchors and collective memory of the physical space as a safe space for queer people to gather and form community (Coffin, 2021). In Capitol Hill, one of the institutional anchors of the gayborhood is Cal Anderson Park, named for Cal Anderson, the first LGBTQ member of the Washington State Legislature (Kiley, “The lesser”). This park is the most prominent instance of space in Seattle that acknowledges a queer person of significance for the city, and the Capitol Hill gayborhood in particular (National Register).

Even as gayborhoods persist, queer people are moving out of them for a variety of reasons. During the same 2000-2012 period covered by Gene Balk, the population of same-sex households increased in King County, excluding Seattle, by 22%. As queer people leave the gayborhood, and more generally make decisions about where they want to live, they are broadening their horizons to the entirety of the Puget Sound region, including White Center. This has led to White Center becoming an island in the cultural archipelago of space in the Puget Sound.

This aspect of White Center’s change is akin to the gentrification that comes with shifting queer populations. In New York, several gayborhoods have been established, and subsequently gentrified, as queer people have migrated en masse throughout the city. Similar instances of migration and subsequent gentrification have occurred in

municipalities across the country. Queer people in Boystown first concentrated as a gayborhood in Boystown, then shifted to Andersonville.

Queer businesses

There is a concentration of queer businesses in White Center, primarily located on White Center's main business strip at 16th Ave SW and SW Roxbury St. Members of the queer community, who live throughout the Puget Sound, patronize these businesses, including the Lumber Yard Bar, Southgate Roller Rink, and The Plant Store among others.

“There's a lot of [queer] businesses [in White Center]. I take my dog to daycare and it's owned by 2 gays. So I feel like I'm supporting the White Center gay community, even when I go in there and drop off my dog. Or if I go to the plant store that's owned by a gay.”

This has led to the expansion of the queer imagination to encompass White Center as a place that is safe for queer people to be in community with one another.

Queer organizations

UTOPIA and VietQ are two organizations that have been organizing queer Pacific Islander and Vietnamese communities, respectively, in White Center and the South Sound.

“There are many established, amazing community groups like White Center Pride, UTOPIA, which serves Pacific Islanders across the South Sound. Viet Q, which is a queer Vietnamese org that's done amazing night markets across all of South Seattle and Central Seattle, [organizing a community] with heavy roots here, harkening back to how Vietnamese folks were settled here and in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.”

The White Center Community Development Association, which has been operating in White Center for more than 20 years, began engaging with and supporting queer and trans youth in June 2019.

“The WCCDA does a lot of interesting work in White Center. They’ve been here a long time and are run by a long time resident who used to be on the school board, and they have had now for several years LGBTQ specific programming. They run an internship and they pay kids to come and be a part. My son was in it. He was in that group. you have a bar, and you have pride, and the WCCDA is doing something. That starts to feel like more of a solid thing.”

Simultaneously, White Center Pride hosted its first pride event in 2019, and has since institutionalized monthly happy hours at local businesses. They build community among the queer population of White Center, and seek to establish relationships between the existing businesses and their membership, who are mostly newer queer White Center community members.

“What started as an informal organization, White Center Pride has become a 501(c)3 nonprofit. They throw an annual street festival, host monthly happy hours, and do little things with the community. It’s brought together a larger group of LGBT [people] in the White Center area, everybody who is passionate about making White Center great and making a strong place for LGBT [people]. [They] kind of stepped in and filled a niche of bringing the gays and the businesses together and creating events for people to come out and get to know each other.”

What’s happening in White Center?

What is happening in White Center is, in part, a result of the gentrification of Capitol Hill in Seattle. Queerness intersects every demographic category, including income. As the price of living in Capitol Hill has increased amid other signals of gentrification, queer people with less resources have been priced out of the neighborhood. This exodus of queer people with less income is commensurate with a shift in the demographics of the neighborhood. In Capitol Hill’s situation, younger workers from the tech industry started

taking over the nightlife on Capitol Hill and decided to stay. There's also been additional development spurred by changes in zoning for areas near transit.

As these changes have occurred, there has been a documented decrease in the percentage of LGBTQ people from 2000-2012 (Balk). However, this exodus from Capitol Hill isn't just the queer people of less means leaving. As the culture of the neighborhood shifts, and queer people no longer exert the same influence and the population concentration dilutes, queer people with means are also leaving the neighborhood. The Seattle Times interviewed a man that sold his condo in Capitol Hill to move to the Central District, where other queer people had bought homes. Thus, queer people with capital and the means have left Capitol Hill for a new vibe.

This has created a cultural archipelago of queer space in the Puget Sound region, including Capitol Hill, Fremont, Wallingford, White Center, and Downtown Tacoma to name a few locations. This is critical in explaining why White Center has been framed as the new Capitol Hill, even as a gayborhood itself. The owner of the Lumberyard Bar had this to say about White Center becoming a gayborhood:

"The roller rink...they do [pride] skate the first Wednesday of every month. And it's huge. They're always packed, they always sell out. It's a truly diverse population. I think that's what makes Rat City, White Center the next sort of...I don't wanna say gayborhood, but it's developing its own identity." (IN Close)

This sentiment is getting at the truth of the matter, which is that White Center's identity is changing. The unincorporated community is experiencing gentrification, which will

result in the displacement of those community members who cannot weather the increase in the cost of housing commensurate with this phenomenon.

However, this change does not mean that White Center is a gayborhood. There are four distinct characteristics of gayborhoods as defined by Amin Ghaziani. White Center has a cluster of queer commercial businesses (The Lumberyard Bar, Southgate Roller Rink), a concentration of residences, and unique culture. In Ghaziani's definition of what makes a gayborhood, he indicates that the LGBTQ community sets the tone of the neighborhood. In White Center, the diverse community of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Central American refugees and migrants have built a community that sets the tone. They organized as the WCCDA in 2007, to develop opportunities and advocate for their own community, as they were left without proper representation for providing supportive urban services. In 2019, they responded to a shift in the community, seeking to empower queer youth, the same month that White Center Pride organized. This is a signal that the WCCDA continues to set the tone in White Center.

Future of White Center

Annexation

Since the beginning of colonial developments in the 1870s, White Center has been uniquely characterized by its status as unincorporated King County, unencumbered by Seattle's law enforcement. In the wake of the Prohibition era (1916-1933), the White Center community opened more bars and kept them open longer, not required to conform to Seattle's more restrictive policies on alcohol sales. The fires that have blazed in White

Center's business district have been made worse by the lack of enforceable building codes and standards applicable in White Center.

Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA) has critical implications for the future of White Center. The GMA identifies cities as the best provider of urban services, and requires that unincorporated, urbanized locations in the state of Washington be labeled Potential Annexation Areas (PAAs). White Center's PAA identifies Seattle as the city that is slated to annex the area.

There is no defined deadline for when the process of annexation needs to be completed. In 2016, state legislators in Olympia passed a funding package that would have compensated the city of Seattle to alleviate the cost burden of annexation and integration of White Center into the city's bureaucracy. However, this opportunity was never taken advantage of by Seattle's government. At the time, the Seattle Times indicated that upcoming Seattle City Council elections could shift the political circumstances needed to begin the process of annexation (Beekman).

As of 2022, the annexation ball remains in Seattle's court, so to speak. Once Seattle begins the process, the question of annexation will fall to the voters of White Center. White Center's changing demographics could shift the political winds in favor of that potential referendum, but that outcome remains to be seen. What is certain is that state policy is geared towards the irrevocable change that will come with annexation of White Center by Seattle.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This project began with a focus on how queer space manifests within the built environment. Forces of discrimination, post colonial land speculation in the form of gentrification, and heteronormativity have had an outsized influence on the development of urban space in the United States, particularly as it relates to minority and marginalized communities. That legacy impacts White Center as well, one of the most diverse communities in King County. The following includes a project summary, lessons for the practice of planning, limitations of my research, and contemplation about the direction of future research.

Project Summary

The literature on planning and the built environment, as they relate to the queer community, are two sides of the same coin. One side is about how the planning profession is a reinforcement of the heteronormative dominant power structure in the United States, uniquely expressed in the prevalence of single family home zoning. The other side of the coin is how interpersonal dynamics between queer people have resulted in a cyclical reshaping of the built form, despite a lack of professional planning. This cycle of change, along with a noticeable increase in the “acceptance” of homosexuality in broader culture and policy, has resulted in collection of interconnected queer space in a heterosexual world. This cultural archipelago is a grouping of queer islands in a sea of heterosexuality. Regardless of the type of queer space, these expressions of community

provide supportive services of all kinds, and are important for the well being of the LGBTQ community.

In order to improve research on queer space in the built environment in the United States and bring it up to par with research on other demographic groups, the US Census would need to expand on the data they collect about queer Americans. However, there are a variety of reasonable concerns that queer Americans would have with the U.S.

Government maintaining information about queer identity.

Informed by this body of literature, I sought to understand White Center's emergence as a potential new gay district in the cultural archipelago of the Puget Sound. I chose to interview key informants that could speak to the emergence of the queer community in White Center, and the impact that has had on the community at large. This approach sought to document the contemporary perspective of the queer people who have fostered a prominent community in White Center, and its impact on the built environment.

This case study of White Center, informed by the literature and my own research, helps us understand the impacts that contemporary economic development patterns have on the queer community, how interpersonal relationships in the queer community inform personal location decisions, and how the creation of queer businesses in proximity with one another can result in a synergy of forces that draw queer people seeking community. By expanding the study of queer space in the built environment beyond gayborhoods, we can reserve that moniker for the legacy neighborhoods that rose in prominence for their

association with gay men and the LGBTQ rights movement. New queer districts will continue to appear as queer people move to new locations and build community without needing to set the tone of the neighborhood.

Lessons for Planning Practice

Planners in the United States have utilized exclusive zoning policies to dictate development of the built form. To that end, the policies reinforced by restrictive zoning have also reinforced the heteronormative status quo, giving land and power over to the families and individuals aligned with the prevailing cultural orientation of the nuclear family.

Single Family Zoning

Seattle's planners historically established single family home zoning. However, the Washington State Legislature passed a law in 2023 that bans single family home zoning in Seattle and its suburbs by requiring that duplexes be allowed throughout the municipalities, with some notably wealthy exceptions (Gutman & Beekman). This change in policy is a welcome shift from the status quo, but doesn't resolve the inherent disparities that exist in the outsized voice that non-queer people have in the allocation of space in the built environment. Seattle's municipal government has engaged with queer people in relatively passive ways. In 2015, then Mayor Ed Murray unveiled 11 rainbow crosswalks in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. This was the first instance of the city's acknowledgement of Capitol Hill as a neighborhood populated by LGBTQ people. In the following years, the city of Seattle's Office of Housing issued a study to look at the

inequities inherent in senior LGBTQ housing and services. That study resulted in the construction of Pride Place, an affordable housing complex on Capitol Hill that will be marketed towards LGBTQ seniors and provide LGBTQ seniors with care and dignity, without shame or discrimination (JSeattle). These two initiatives within the city of Seattle show the progression that the city has taken to address some of the inequities that queer people face in housing and planning. The construction of Pride Place is a step in the right direction, though not adequate enough to meet the needs of all members of the queer community. Time will tell whether the changes coming to Seattle's planning processes will be enough to meet the needs of those who don't fit the traditional heteronormative mold reinforced by single-family home zoning.

Interconnected Queer Space

Amin Ghaziani's cultural archipelago framework has potentially transformational implications for the field of planning. Often, planners operate exclusively within the parameters of their municipal jurisdiction, with varying degrees of cooperation and collaboration across those borders. What this framework can lead us to understand is how communities are not beholden to the borders around which we plan. The decisions made in one neighborhood or community have the potential to impact other communities and municipalities, informed by the existing interpersonal and communal connections commensurate with the human experience. Planners should take note of this phenomenon, to inform planning priorities for communities that transcend rigid planning boundaries. Unfortunately, many of the issues that impact the reallocation of queer people throughout the built environment don't have an answer in the planning profession, as

planners do not control the laws that govern market-rate real estate, which drive gentrification and displacement in urban areas.

Planning Data

Planning in the United States is heavily informed by the US Census, the most reliable dataset for demographic research and policy making in the United States. However, it maintains a large blind spot in its administration, only collecting data on queer people that tracks same-sex households. This method excludes all individual queer people, and begs the question of how a trans identifying person in a couple would be categorized in the Census data. This is in addition to the US Census's problematic history of deleting or changing entries in the US Census that identified a same-sex coupled household.

When planning policies in the United States are developed using this data set that doesn't accurately account for queer people and the unique challenges that the LGBTQ community faces, inequalities will continue to persist. Single queer people who cannot afford to remain in their neighborhood are forced out by market pressures. Yet, we do not currently account for this movement in the US Census, a detriment to the queer community's ability to advocate for security and a voice amidst an invisible shift within the data. The critical factor in this dynamic is the supremacy and unlimited power that market driven rental increases have in the city of Seattle. As queer people are priced out of gay neighborhoods and the community changes, queer people with more means look elsewhere to follow the community. Oftentimes this progression means starting a new community in a place that is more affordable, at the expense of the people who already call that place home. If planners truly care about equity in their practice, and making

communities for all, those communities must be made affordable for all. However, there are inherent privacy and safety concerns with the US government compiling specific data on the LGBTQ community that caution an ill-informed approach to a more inclusive US Census.

Inclusive Planning

Inclusive planning must start from the least common denominator, namely trans women of color and their experience in the city. Trans women of color are the most at-risk for violence against them, simply for being who they are. When planners create strategies and policies, construct a public space project, or provide feedback on a bus stop design, an inclusive planning approach would take into consideration the lived experience of trans people of color. Until this segment of the community can freely enjoy space in the city without fear of reprisal or violence, the planning profession cannot achieve its mandate of providing public space for all.

Limitations

The biggest limitation in my research is the small number of interviewees that I consider to be long term White Center residents, those who have lived in White Center for more than 10 years. By focusing on key informants of White Center's LGBTQ community in my interview selection criteria, I was unable to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary lived experience of the broader White Center community. Another limitation in my research is the inability to track movement of queer people from one location to another. This information would have been useful in

determining the actual impact Capitol Hill's plateau has had on the movement of queer people to White Center. These are but some of the limitations that come with qualitative and quantitative demographic research.

Direction of Future Research

Future research into queer space in the built environment needs to be focused away from the legacy structure and status of gayborhoods, towards the burgeoning queer spaces that exist and continue to appear in different places across the urban to rural spectrum around the world. Research into queer space needs to evolve past the central focus on the spaces created and made famous by cisgendered white men.

For White Center specifically, future research into the annexation of this unincorporated community by the city of Seattle will likely yield some interesting conclusions, given the history of White Center's dynamic with Seattle's government, utility providers, and law enforcement. Even without the catalyst of annexation, White Center will be a place of interest in the Puget Sound region as change continues to impact the community. The introduction of the RapidRide H Line is an example of one of the forces that will influence and direct investment, as the region responds to the massive challenge of mitigating and adapting to climate change by reducing emissions. The community's response to all of this change will be another path for future research.

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DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

January 23, 2023

Dear Christopher Miller:

On 1/23/2023, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Where Goes the Gayborhood? An Analysis of Transformation and Migration in Seattle’s LGBTQ+ Population
Investigator:	Christopher Miller
IRB ID:	STUDY00017053
Funding:	None

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Category 2).

- COVID NOTE: See the [HSD website](#) for the latest COVID guidelines for conducting human subjects research.
- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
- **Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data or specimens (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or, you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).**

If you consider changes to the activities in the future and know that the changes will require HSD review (or you are not certain), you may request a review or new determination by submitting a Modification to this application. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the [GUIDANCE Exempt Research](#).

HSD does not review or approve consent plans and consent materials for exempt research. Researchers are still responsible for providing subjects with information about the research prior to their agreement to participate. Refer to the [GUIDANCE Exempt Research](#) for details about what information should be provided. You may wish to use the optional [TEMPLATE Consent Exempt Research](#) as a guide.

Thank you for your commitment to ethical and responsible research. We wish you great success!

4333 Brooklyn Ave. NE, Box 359470 Seattle, WA 98195-9470

main 206.543.0098 fax 206.543.9218 hsdinfo@u.washington.edu www.washington.edu/research/hsd

Implemented 10/27/2022– Version 1.3 - Page 1 of 2

Sincerely,

Dana Gold, MA
IRB Administrator, Committee D
Email: deg4@uw.edu
Phone: 206.543.5602

Key Informant Interview Questions

Personal Location Decision Factors

How long have you lived in/near White Center?

What is your unit type?

Do you rent or own?

What were some of the considerations that informed your move to where you live now?

White Center Community

What is your relationship with the White Center community?

Do you consider yourself part of the White Center community?

How do you engage with the White Center community?

Do you consider White Center to be home?

When you picture the community of White Center, what do you see?

Gentrification and Displacement in White Center

What changes have you seen in White Center since you've lived there?

How do you feel about these changes?

Do these changes impact the way you feel about White Center?

Do you have concerns about gentrification and the potential displacement of long-term White Center residents?

Do you consider yourself at risk for potential displacement from White Center?

Do you see yourself remaining in White Center long-term?

LGBTQ Prominence in White Center

What is your relationship with White Center's LGBTQ community?

How often do you find yourself in LGBTQ oriented spaces in White Center?

Within the last 5 years, there have been a number of news stories that refer to White Center as the new Capitol Hill. What is your reaction to that sentiment?

White Center hosted its first pride event in 2019. How have you received this recent increased prominence of the LGBTQ community in White Center?

Do you feel that the LGBTQ community sets the tone of the White Center neighborhood?