

Dear Mayor, Plan Commission, Alders, Common Council, City Staff,

We write today to introduce the Capitol East Business Association (CEBA), formed over the summer of 2019 and comprised of local business owners along the East Washington corridor and surrounding blocks.

Over the past 15 years this corridor has, with civic vision, planning, zoning, funding, and massive investment from private enterprise, risen from the dereliction that defined this section of the Isthmus for more than a generation. Where there was a stretch of underutilized or abandoned relicts of a pre-modern industrial era, sprawling car dealerships, and empty warehouses, there is now a vibrant, evolving economic ecosystem reviving the East Washington corridor with nearly 1,000 new housing units, a half million square feet of new commercial space, and dozens of new or relocated businesses. While to some spectators it may seem as though this is an inevitable and inexorable growth, the reality is that the toil, creativity, and risk of business owners and developers, along with time and energy contributed by City Staff and Alders, has built this new cityscape. It is, however, still a work in progress. Careful consideration, further investment, and an expansive perspective that includes an appreciation of the momentum and synergy necessary for growth, are all essential.

The Cap East Corridor has been planned and zoned for the kind of high-density dynamic developments that have in fact come to fruition. The office, retail, and entertainment growth have brought thousands (yes, thousands) of jobs to the neighborhood. Along with those jobs have come the restaurant, entertainment, and hospitality anchors of a neighborhood that is finding its own identity.

With growth and increased density come challenges that every growing city must navigate. This year alone we have the exciting logistical challenge and benefit of adding Bus Rapid Transit to public transportation, the re-engineering of Law Park, a revamped land use plan for the City, and weighing the impact a new class of super-loud jets would have, if approved, on a substantial portion of the city. With these and other significant projects the City, neighborhoods, and alders have rightly deliberated, engaged the public, and taken a long view of consequences and costs. Except for the recent proliferation and concentration of loosely regulated private, or quasi-private, social service organizations that will, because of that mass and gravity within such a small area, have a cooling effect on development, housing, and job growth in the immediate surrounds. These are in precisely the zone that two decades and two rounds of urban planning have identified as the area best suited to tall, dense, housing, office, and mixed-use development. It also happens to be where employers, consumers, and new residents actually want to be, in the walkable, vibrant downtown. To imagine that there will be no consequences of loading services for homeless and vulnerable populations within a few block radius of each other (in the heart of the area planned for new dense development) and that this will not have sweeping adverse impacts on the likelihood of attracting new development on adjacent properties would be willful disregard on a civic level.

There is no doubt that the private organizations providing these important and urgent services are a benefit to the fabric of the city. The fact that the City is relying heavily on these organizations to fill a policy and budgetary void should not preclude careful scrutiny of the impacts these projects will have on the neighborhood. Nor should the convenience of a third party partially addressing a short term budgetary line item define the long range planning for an urban core district. The need for more and better services for homeless and vulnerable populations is not in doubt; the location, concentration, and impact on existing property owners and future development should be a critical factor in the decision making process.

Considering only the activities within the buildings that are the Beacon, Salvation Army, and St John's is to ignore the real and precarious environment that is evolving outside these establishments currently. The new planned Salvation Army Redevelopment, which seeks to triple its capacity, seems like a sensible response to the increased need for their services. Even a cursory review process, however, reveals the need for a far more detailed economic impact study, security/public safety conversation, and long range planning consequences. There is also the practical impact of underutilizing a large tract of land with a lower density project that, as a non-profit, generates no tax revenue. Added to this loss of between \$750-\$1 million or more in annual tax revenue from a project comparable to the other high rise projects on the Corridor, costs of police and fire safety visits (over 1,500 police visits in the past five years) are real. Even if one unreasonably imagined that tripling the capacity inside the building would not increase the incidence of misbehavior outside and around the building, the status quo is costly and a public safety hazard. Couldn't we imagine funding more and better services for exactly this issue with the added tax revenue from four or five city blocks worth of taxable development.

At the very few meetings where public input has been heard, the vast and overwhelming concern about current and future conditions in the neighborhood have been raised. Local property owners and families have demanded a more thorough review of the potential adverse safety and economic impacts of the Salvation Army expansion.

Should not the same far-sighted leadership and scrutiny of plans that impact whole neighborhoods apply to the planning decisions that will have real and lasting effects on the growth and sustainability of this central core district?

If we ignore what we know to be basic fundamentals of urban growth and make decisions based only on expediency rather than the measured benefit to future generations, our negligence would not just be myopic, it could, without hyperbole, be devastating.

Our Alders, City Staff, Mayors office, and citizens should require a thorough review, study, and discussion of this project and the future of the Capitol East.

Sincerely,

Capitol East Business Association Members