



Casualties of Progress: Losing a Local Business to Growth

By Yves Colon

Kathy Weber is going to miss her corner office. From a chair behind a modest desk, she looks west over the tops of evergreens and the brick homes of Loyal Heights.

“We’d love to stay here,” says Weber, who in 2010 moved her immigration law practice to the building at 8015 15th Avenue, in the heart of Crown Hill. “We’re all close to each other and enjoy practicing together. There is no conflict.”

Weber, 65, shares the office at with six other attorneys, all of whom are self-employed with a variety of practices, including immigration, bankruptcy, civil and criminal law. Sadly, they say, they will have to move out by the end of the year. The office and an adjoining property were recently sold to make room for a modern complex of 18 townhouses.

As Seattle continues to grow, and some of the focus of that growth is on Crown Hill with new construction popping up all over the neighborhood a few miles north of downtown Seattle, the Crown Hill Urban Village Committee for Smart Growth is engaging city officials in a conversation about where, and what shape that growth should take, in the neighborhood of primarily small businesses and modest single-family homes. In addition to Crown Hill, the group’s focus also includes the adjoining neighborhoods of Whittier Heights, Olympic Manor, Loyal Heights and Greenwood.



Two years ago, recently out of law school, Rita Espinosa Arguello teamed up with another attorney and signed up for space on the floor below Weber’s. At \$1,600 a month for offices and a conference room, Espinosa thought they would be there a long time. In addition, the Crown Hill location, with connecting bus service, is ideal for her clients, mainly low-income immigrants who at times must travel great distances, and use public transportation, to access her offices.

“They’re coming from far away, from other parts of the state,” says Espinosa Arguello, who lives in Ballard. “Sometimes I need to come here on weekends, spend the day with them. This is only adding insult to injury.”

Espinosa Arguello says she understands why the neighborhood, with its proximity to transit, restaurants and downtown Seattle, is growing. She cautioned, though, that the growth is taking away the energy and diversity brought by small businesses, like hers, and low-income homeowners and renters no longer able to afford increasing property taxes and rents, and the costs associated with living in a more affluent neighborhood.

“We’re kind of casualties of the process,” says Espinosa Arguello, 31.

Weber says she fears they will be losing more than access to clients.

“We’re losing the connection to the neighborhood,” says Weber, who moved to Seattle in 1978, when rent for a studio apartment in Ballard cost \$300.

Espinosa Arguello, who moved to Seattle in 2013 after graduating from American University in Washington, D.C., says she feels she and her partner were misled when they rented because they thought they would be there a lot longer. She says the process of selling the property could have been done more openly, to save her and her partner time and resources.

“Now we’re going to have to start the whole process again,” she says. “It’s going to be a huge operation.”

This is the second time Weber, 65, has been chased away by rising rents in Seattle. The first time was in 2007, when she left the office she had occupied in Ballard for 18 years. Once again, she’ll have to move her boxes of documents and case files to another location, preferably a neighborhood like Crown Hill with comparable services and amenities.

“Our jobs are stressful,” says Weber, who lives 10 minutes from the office, “and Crown Hill is low key. To be in a neighborhood takes it down a notch.”

They would prefer not to have to go downtown, with traffic congestion, lack of parking, and expensive rents. Both women realize they cannot stop the changes that are moving across Seattle, and see the growth as a necessary part of life in a desirable city.

However, they feel that it is leaving people like them behind. “This growth is kicking us and our clients out,” Espinosa Arguello says. “We can’t all work at Amazon. I’m happy for these people, but it’s stressful not knowing where we’re going to be next.”

*Right now, there are 15 housing projects in active development in Crown Hill Urban Village, including the project displacing Kathy and her immigration law practice. Of these, only one includes retail space, while others contain limited live-to-work units. Crown Hill Urban Village Committee for Smart Growth envisions mixed-use development along arterials that are built to support small and locally owned businesses, and development that attracts pedestrian friendly businesses like coffee shops, small retail and office space. **Learn more and sign up for emails: CrownHillUrbanVillage.org***