

The Ave Business Survey

DRAFT FINDINGS

September 17, 2012

Introduction

The Ave Business Survey was administered by two student interns from the UW Carlson Center, with the support of the Department of Neighborhoods and the Department of Planning and Development in the spring of 2012. A total of 31 businesses on the 4200, 4300, 4500, and 4700 blocks on University Way in Seattle's University District participated in the survey.

Method

The survey questions were designed to gauge how likely businesses on the Ave would be to engage street youth in their day-to-day business, what factors encouraged or discouraged business activity on the Ave, what the prevailing issues that retailers face on the Ave are, and their thoughts on possible solutions to those issues. The survey questions served as a guide for one-on-one interviews with business owners on the Ave. In order to get the highest participation among food vendors, the interviewers canvassed the Ave during the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m, to avoid the lunch and dinner rushes. The afternoon time also proved to be the best time to reach store owners. The interviews also focused on the best way to reach out to small, mostly ethnic businesses on the Ave, since they were identified as a 'hard to reach' group, given their varying levels of comfort with English, possible lack of membership in existing business associations such as the Chamber and their inability to leave the store unattended to attend public meetings.

Major Findings

1. Given the Ave's reputation as a retail street with high business turnover, a surprising number of businesses have been on the Ave over the long term. For example, 12 respondents have been around for 10 years or longer while some have been around for more than 25 years. Longer term businesses on the Ave include the Woolly Mammoth (42 years), Shiga's One World Shop (50 years), Haagen-Daaz (31 years), Four Corners Art and Frames, The Continental Pastry Shop (39 years) and Rudy's Barbershop (19 years). Newer businesses include Banh Mi Unwrapped (less than a year) and Woori Market (less than 2 years).
2. The top two reasons cited for locating on the Ave was the proximity to the University and its student population (9 respondents cited this as the primary reason) and heavy foot traffic on the Ave, comparable to Downtown but at a lower rent (8 respondents cited this as the primary reason). Less common reasons that led to the choice of the Ave as a business location included the purchase of an existing business and just cheaper rent.
3. Of 27 businesses surveyed only one business owner, the owner of J's Market, expressed a preference for a language other than English (Korean) for communication. The majority of businesses were also members of the UDistrict Chamber of Commerce.

4. 27 respondents expressed the following issues as negatively impacting their business:
 - Homeless people sleeping on sidewalks outside of store
 - Business sales are too reliant on students
 - Loitering, drug-dealing, and street people deter visitors especially near the Jack in the Box
 - Lack of parking
 - Lighter consumer crowds & foot traffic further north on the Ave. past 45th St.
 - Employees and visitors feeling of being 'unsafe'
 - Lack of support for healthier or higher quality/priced food options within business community

5. Overall there was broad agreement on the problem locations along the Ave: the activity near the Jack in the Box and around 'A Pizza Mart' as well as 'J's Market.' This anecdotal evidence supports data that these are the 'hotspots' on the Ave.

6. The following ideas were offered up as strategies to address issues:
 - Advertising business at the Farmer's Market or strengthening business connection with the Farmer's Market
 - Reduce cost of parking
 - Stronger police presence on the Ave
 - Increased surveillance: install cameras and post signs advertising that there are cameras
 - Incentivize owners to take a more active role in the community (community-policing)
 - Integrate businesses with service providers in the community to develop more positive relationships with homeless and street-involved youth
 - Selling the business and relocating