

# Duwamish Valley Program

## Lessons Learned from Community Engagement

Seattle's Duwamish Valley Program (DVP) is a multi-departmental collaboration led by the Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE) and the Office of Planning & Community Development (OPCD) to advance environmental justice and equitable development in the Duwamish Valley neighborhoods of South Park and Georgetown. On June 27, 2018, the City released the Duwamish Valley Action Plan (Action Plan), a City-community shared vision to promote collaboration and guide the City's investments in the Duwamish Valley for years to come. By applying the program's racial equity outcomes, in 2017, we engaged more than 500 Duwamish Valley residents, workers, and businesses (the majority being communities of color, immigrants and refugees, youth, limited-English proficiency individuals, and low-income community members). Their priorities shaped the Action Plan, which includes strategies and actions related to: healthy environment; parks and open spaces; community capacity; mobility and transportation; economic opportunity and jobs; affordable housing; and public safety.

### **Engaging, Convening, & Maintaining Relationships with the Communities in the Duwamish Valley**

A key element of success was the City's decision to hire as the Duwamish Valley Advisor (program manager) a person who used to manage programs, projects, and inclusive community engagement efforts for a community-based organization in the Duwamish Valley for six years before joining the City of Seattle; is an immigrant and non-native English speaker; and shares the culture of the biggest minority group in the area. He brought many of the relationships, contacts, and community trust with him to this role, which allowed the City to act as soon as he was hired, building trust with community members much quicker than normal. He previously served on the [Equity & Environment Initiative's](#) 16-person Community Partners Steering Committee that was tasked with creating the first-in-the-nation municipal Equity & Environment Agenda. During this process, he engaged and led workshops with the Spanish-, Vietnamese- and Somali-speaking communities, which served as the basis of the DVP's work.

Building from the Duwamish Valley Advisor's assets, the DVP staff and a diverse group of community members worked together to design and implement a culturally-appropriate public engagement plan that built on existing meetings to reduce negative impacts on the community. This approach supported capacity building, leadership development, and the vetting of actions while advancing community priorities, the City's environmental justice guiding principles, and the DVP's racial equity outcomes. As part of the public engagement plan, DVP staff:

1. Reviewed and synthesized numerous community planning documents from the past 20 years to honor the countless hours community members had already spent on identifying their hopes and priorities;
2. Met one-on-one or in small groups with community leaders to solicit periodic guidance;
3. Attended regularly scheduled Georgetown Community Council and South Park Neighborhood Association meetings to track community concerns and activities, provide updates, and solicit feedback;
4. Engaged the South Park Merchants Association and Georgetown Merchants Association to provide updates and solicit feedback;
5. Included printed prioritization materials in the Georgetown Gazette to garner input from community members who don't attend regular council meetings;
6. Hired community experts to conduct in-language meetings for Latinx, Vietnamese, and Somali communities (whenever possible), and for youth of color;

7. Coordinated with the Equity & Environment Initiative report-back sessions (e.g., intergenerational dinner and karaoke night with Vietnamese seniors and youth; arts and cultural events with Latinx community members; tea parties and living room forums with Somali community members; and boat tours with youth of color). Community-based organizations were funded via foundation partners to convene these report-back sessions in alignment with their existing program and mission-centered activities.
8. Translated materials into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Somali;
9. Used simultaneous interpretation at meeting and events;
10. Hired trusted community leaders to co-design and co-facilitate meetings;
11. Held neighborhood-wide events such as multilingual open houses and ice cream socials.

As a result, between February and December 2017, the DVP engaged and received direction from more than 500 Duwamish Valley residents, workers, and businesses (majority being communities of color, immigrants, refugees, youth, limited English proficiency individuals, people with low incomes, and small merchants) to establish priorities for our work. This feedback informed the mid-term opportunities (with their respective strategies and actions) and long-term strategies included in the Action Plan.

### **Co-designing and Co-creating Solutions with the Communities in the Duwamish Valley**

Our effort integrated partnerships with community-based groups to host unconventional community engagement events to gather community input that built their capacity and avoided duplicating efforts. For example, DVP staff hired a community-led team to work with the City to design and host a Multilingual Open House & Holiday Celebration in December 2017 that attracted approximately 100 community members (majority people of color, immigrants, refugees, people with low incomes, youth, and limited-English proficiency individuals). The co-created format included art, music, cultural history, food, and in-language review and discussion of preliminary Action Plan strategies. By contracting with community members, the event supported the work of a neighborhood group that didn't have funding to provide pro bono consultation services. Other similar co-created events included: intergenerational dinner and karaoke night with Vietnamese seniors and Duwamish Valley Youth Corps members, tea parties and living room forums with the Somali community, and boat tours with Latinx youth and their families. Community members have felt more comfortable and safe sharing their priorities and co-developing solutions in these informal settings that celebrate their cultures and traditions and recognized their expertise. Further, these community-focused events enabled us to understand interests and priorities that were both shared among, and specific to, communities rather than focus only on "consensus building" or priorities distilled from several sources.

The Action Plan identifies actions which respond to community priorities and are centered in environmental justice and racial equity (e.g. when designing a tree planting and maintenance program ensure it incorporates anti-displacement strategies, local hiring, and youth pathways; the same should happen as we make other improvements to the environment and infrastructure). This approach will holistically improve community health, ensure community buy-in, and will more easily foster ongoing community stewardship of the Action Plan, in addition to forging a genuine partnership with the City.

### **Addressing Systemic Inequities that Affect Health as Part of Our Community Engagement Work**

Our work recognizes and treats community members for what they are: experts in their communities. Since its inception, City staff and community members co-developed and co-created the process. By sharing influence and decision-making, we worked as a team. This was a direct result of putting into practice the racial equity outcomes that the DVP adopted in early 2017 (which are based in the goals of the City's Equity & Environment Agenda and the equity drivers of the City's Equitable Development

Initiative), which center the experiences of communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native peoples, youth, people with low incomes, and limited-English proficiency individuals. Please see pages 10-15 from the [Equity & Environment Agenda](#) for a more comprehensive perspective of issues raised by communities of color related to health, environment, and justice. As we learned from the Equity & Environment Agenda creation process, creative, fun engagement can also serve as a mechanism for increasing social cohesion – an important issue that impacts health outcomes, especially in communities of color.

### **Institutional Structure and Actions that Fostered and Catalyzed Success in the Duwamish Valley**

The work of the DVP includes ensuring that the City’s practices, strategies, and actions in the Duwamish Valley shift from “business as usual” to an approach that gets us closer to structural racial equity. Even though the City has embarked on this journey, we recognize there is more learning, improvement, and implementation to be done -- we are committed to this work for years to come. The structures and key actions that have fostered and catalyze successes in the Duwamish Valley include:

*Institutionalizing Practices that Support and Encourage Change:* In February 2015, the Seattle City Council passed [Resolution 31567](#), directing the creation of a City Interdepartmental Team (Duwamish IDT) to align and coordinate City programs and capital investments to address many of the issues affecting residents. In April, 2016, the City published the [Equity and Environment Agenda](#), a people of color-led strategy to advance environmental justice, and announced the creation of the [Duwamish Valley Program](#). In May 2016, as part of a major update of the Seattle 2035, a 20-year comprehensive plan, the City published the [Equitable Development Implementation Plan](#). The DVP is a multi-departmental effort led by the Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE) and the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) to advance and operationalize the environmental justice and equitable development goals outlined in the Equity & Environment Agenda and Equitable Development Implementation Plan. Focused on the Duwamish Valley neighborhoods of South Park and Georgetown, the program is driven by environmental justice guiding principles, [racial equity outcomes](#), community input, and community-led plans.

*Understanding Racial Inequities and Health Disparities:* Given the documented health disparities experienced in the Duwamish Valley, the DVP completed a Healthy Living Assessment (HLA) to understand how people use their neighborhood. The HLA gathered information about community health factors to identify interconnections between various aspects of the built and social environments and to orient strategies toward ones that can improve the health of community members. It used 16 health indicators available at the neighborhood level to identify assets and gaps in the health-promoting infrastructure and can be used to identify health improvement opportunities, to describe the relationship of built environment factors to health, and to track progress toward neighborhood improvement.

*Recognizing Our Past:* DVP staff reviewed multiple documents from the last 20 years to synthesize community hopes and concerns, to leverage community expertise, to respect the time communities have already devoted to expressing needs and priorities, to build trust, and to show responsiveness. Beginning with the most recent source, some of the key documents included in the review were:

- South Park Public Safety Report (2017)
- Georgetown Open Space Vision Framework (2017)
- Georgetown and South Park Find It, Fix It Community Walks (2016 & 2015, respectively)
- South Park Green Space Vision Plan (2014)
- Duwamish Valley Cumulative Health Impacts Analysis (CHIA) (2013)
- Health Impacts Assessment: Proposed Cleanup Plan for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site (HIA) (2013)

- South Park Action Agenda (2010 update & 2006)
- Duwamish Valley Vision Map & Report (2007)
- South Park and Georgetown Neighborhood Plans (1998 & 1999, respectively)

*Changing Our Present (Delivering Results):* A central aspect of the DVP is to align and coordinate the City’s substantial efforts and investments. Program staff compiled an inventory of approximately 100 programs and 170 projects underway or planned in the Duwamish Valley. Members of the Duwamish Valley Action Team (DAT) evaluated the inventory of current and planned investments to identify opportunities to take immediate action, improve our work, and deliver services in response to community priorities. This process improved communication between the City and community on a range of City-led actions in the Duwamish Valley and resulted in 50 immediate actions in South Park and Georgetown from 2016 to early 2018 or more than \$2 million dollars in investments.

*Working as a Team:* The Duwamish Valley Action Team (DAT) brings together 18 City departments and more than 20 active members. A subset of DAT members—those whose work more consistently intersects with the Duwamish Valley—serve as the project’s Core Team. This team includes OSE, OPCD, Department of Neighborhoods (DON), Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), and the Mayor’s Office. The Core Team stewards the DVP, identifies and recruits resources to working groups as needed, and provides for the needs and logistics of the overall effort. Other DAT members work with the Core Team on the ground. In addition to the five departments listed above, the DAT includes:

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| • City Budget Office                                 | • Seattle Parks and Recreation          |
| • Seattle Department of Transportation               | • Office of Housing                     |
| • Seattle City Light                                 | • Public Health – Seattle& King County  |
| • Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections | • Seattle Human Services Department     |
| • Department of Finance and Administrative Services  | • Office of Arts and Culture            |
| • Office of Economic Development                     | • Office of Intergovernmental Relations |
|  | • Office of Civil Rights                |

Going forward, the DAT will continue to work collaboratively, break silos, use an intersectional approach, and build internal and external partnerships with community, other agencies, and philanthropic organizations to deliver on the opportunities, strategies, and actions included in this Action Plan. It will also respond to emerging community priorities.

*Grounding Our Work in Racial Equity:* The DVP recognizes that historic inequities and systemic racism have a disproportionately negative impact on communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native peoples, youth, limited English proficiency individuals, and people with low incomes. Even though these disparities create environmental, health, economic, and community cohesion challenges that are experienced by all in the Duwamish Valley, the DVP has approached its work in a way that recognizes the resilience of these groups, builds on the strengths present in these communities, and elevates the needs and voices of those most affected. The program put racial equity at the center of its work in the following ways:

- The DVP built its work on the Equity & Environment and Equitable Development initiatives which are both community-led, power-building initiatives for communities of color. This programmatic alignment created more institutional space for a focus on racial equity in the DVP.
- The DVP applied the [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) to develop key program components, processes, and deliverables. This approach ensured that racial equity remained at the heart of the DVP’s work throughout

the process of identifying, prioritizing, and implementing near-term actions, as well as when developing mid-term opportunities and long-term strategies.

- It adopted six racial equity outcomes based on the goals of the Equity & Environment Agenda and the equity drivers of the Equitable Development Initiative. They serve as the program's compass as we aim to advance many, if not all, outcomes through City-led efforts in the Duwamish Valley.
- The DAT participated in a joint City-community racial equity and shared decision-making workshop led by an independent firm, [Equity Matters](#), to promote understanding and commitment to racial equity, as well as to promote the use of a common language and develop approaches for shared decision-making going forward. Community experts representing the Latinx, Vietnamese, Somali, and small business communities were present to guide and ground City staff in community perspectives, priorities, and leadership approaches.
- In collaboration with the Equity & Environment Initiative, the program designed workshops for the DAT to co-create racial equity actions, embedding strategies identified by communities of color, immigrants, refugees, limited English proficiency individuals, and people with low incomes into several high-opportunity projects in the Duwamish Valley.

### **Our Hope for a More Equitable Future**

Most of the opportunities, strategies, and actions in the Duwamish Valley Action Plan directly respond to the priorities of communities of color, immigrants, refugees, youth, limited English proficiency individuals, people with low incomes, and small merchants. Other actions and strategies respond to overall community priorities and presented opportunities to embed racial equity strategies into planned or ongoing City work. As the DVP continues its journey toward achieving environmental justice and racial equity, it will continue to build on, learn from, influence, and support other City efforts and citywide initiatives. Such initiatives include race and social justice, equity and environment, equitable development, inclusive engagement, urban forestry, service delivery, asthma prevention, local hiring and contracting, affordable housing and anti-displacement, and capacity building. The City will use lessons from this work to support expanding efforts in other neighborhoods with high populations of people who bear a disproportionate burden of environmental health impacts, who benefit less directly from environmental and economic progress, who historically lack trust in government, and whose concerns often go unaddressed due to systemic racism.

By applying the City's environmental justice guiding principles and the Program's racial equity outcomes, the strategies and actions in this Action Plan work together as an environmental justice, equitable development, and anti-displacement strategy. If approached individually or without alignment to racial equity outcomes, the very injustices and inequities we are trying to address could be perpetuated. As we advance efforts to reduce health disparities and improve both the natural and built environment, the City will prioritize the implementation of actions that include aspects of place-making and anti-displacement: jobs creation, economic opportunity, pathways out of poverty, developing solutions in partnership with community members, inclusive community engagement, social cohesion and trust building, training, and immediate stabilization of the incumbent community members and businesses.