

Choice Neighborhoods Initiative

The Seattle Housing Authority has received a total of \$30 million through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods Initiative to support residents in their quest for living wage jobs, high quality education and healthy living.

Participation in the Choice Neighborhoods program allows the Seattle Housing Authority to expand the boundaries of redevelopment beyond its public housing community to include the wider neighborhood. The Choice Neighborhoods grant provides important seed money to begin the redevelopment process and engage new community partners.

The [HUD Choice Neighborhoods Initiative](#) was designed to transform distressed neighborhoods with public and assisted housing into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods. This is achieved by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation and access to jobs. In addition to public housing authorities, the initiative will involve local governments, non-profits, and for-profit developers in undertaking comprehensive local planning with residents and the community.



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The Seattle Housing Authority is working with a coalition of partners to transform the neighborhood. Key partners in this initiative include:

- [City of Seattle](#)
- [Seattle University](#)
- [King County](#)

- [Seattle Public Schools](#)
- [Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Neighborcare Health](#)
- [Neighborhood House](#)
- [Historic Seattle](#)

Housing

The long term plan is to focus on expanding housing for all income levels throughout the target area that extends several blocks beyond the Yesler Terrace housing development. Now there are just over 1,000 units of housing in the neighborhood, mostly low-income. The vision is to expand to nearly 6,500 units throughout the neighborhood through rentals and privately-owned homes. This housing would serve residents along an income spectrum based on Area Median Income, as follows:

Less than **30% AMI**: 665

Less than **60% AMI**: 338

Less than **80% AMI**: 892

Market Rate: 4,563

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Total: 6,458

Although the current Yesler Terrace housing has served Seattle families for over fifty years, they no longer meet today's standards in terms of accessibility, energy-efficiency, and healthy living.

The Seattle Housing Authority has already built hundreds of new units, and is planning, designing and constructing hundreds more. The new buildings are rich in amenities and include community meeting spaces and outdoor areas. Many of the new units accommodate people with physical disabilities, and all include features that help improve interior air quality.

Private developers are building and completing new apartment complexes as well. In addition to market-rate rentals, private buildings include "workforce units" with rents affordable to residents earning less than 80% of the area median income.

Investing in people

The success of the new mixed-income dense community will in large part depend on the effectiveness of a sustainable social infrastructure that offers ladders to success for current and future low-income residents. Approximately \$4.5 million of the Choice Neighborhoods grant will be invested in the three key areas that are critical to overcoming poverty:

- Improving educational achievement
- Increasing economic opportunities
- Enhancing access to quality healthcare and healthy living resources

Seattle University is overseeing a “cradle-to-college” pipeline of educational support services based on the [Harlem Children’s Zone](#) model. Seattle Public Schools and other educational entities are key partners. This approach will make it possible for low-income children in the neighborhood to have access to a range of programs from early learning (e.g. Head Start) and tutoring to mentoring aimed at helping students enter college and receive scholarships. The coalition to support the educational efforts of Yesler’s children and youth is based on the belief that the success in education is the best pathway out of poverty for children and youth. [A white paper](#) details the goals and theory of change for this initiative.

Neighborhood improvements

The vision for the Neighborhood component is to capitalize on Yesler’s central location by transforming it into a diverse, connected, safe and sustainable neighborhood of choice for people of all backgrounds and incomes.

This component focuses on the community infrastructure and amenities that are needed to create a truly viable mixed-income neighborhood. Choice Neighborhood grant funding of \$4.5 million is being leveraged with other funds to:

- Create a pedestrian hillclimb connecting Yesler Terrace to the Little Saigon neighborhood along the 10th Ave. S. right of way.
- Enhance Horiuchi Park, with help from the City of Seattle, to include community garden space.
- Improve neighborhood pedestrian connections and open space.

Long term plans

Full neighborhood transformation will take up to 15 years and will be accomplished with an investment of nearly \$2 billion in public and private funds, including the \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods grant, as well as funding committed by the City of Seattle and JPMorgan Chase. The plan’s goals are threefold:

1. Transform distressed public housing into energy-efficient, mixed-income housing that is physically and financially viable over the long term.
2. Support positive outcomes for families who live in the area, particularly outcomes related to residents’ health, safety, employment and education.

3. Transform neighborhoods of poverty into viable, mixed-income neighborhoods by improving local services and access to good schools, public transportation and other public assets.