

December 10, 2019

Aicha Woods  
Executive Director  
City Plan  
City of New Haven

Dear Legislative Committee:

I write this letter to ask you to table the Yale-New Haven development at Saint Raphael's for three primary reasons. Research evidence suggests that a development like this will prompt displacement through unaffordability, which has a strong causal link to poorer health outcomes. Second, this development carries no publicly announced direct investment to Dwight residents, and fails to offer clear data on jobs created for residents and other economic effects. Finally, very few members of the Dwight community know about this development. The development process has not been participatory, open, nor democratic, and it is for those reasons we are here today. This is a letter in support of building the community health of Dwight and beyond, health that is founded in economic and housing security. We want to work with Yale-New Haven to develop a democratic and just plan for development based on resident needs and research evidence. Tabling this item will help make possible a more responsible and fair development for all.

We support Yale-New Haven's stated mission of quality treatment and dedicated care, but the weight of countless lived experiences alongside dozens of research articles shows that the approach to development you see today, one which is absent of any sort of direct investment for Dwight residents, will indirectly burden households with higher rents, cause displacement through unaffordability, and destabilize housing for neighborhood residents (Gomez 2012).

As the Smilow Cancer Center here in New Haven and Johns Hopkins Medical Campus in Baltimore have shown, hospital developments that do not begin with community collaboration will fracture the neighborhoods in which they reside (Gomez 2012). To allow for true community health, more time is needed to ensure this development will directly benefit the neighborhood around it, either through a legally binding community benefits agreement or otherwise.

With no ill intent, this development, as it stands, goes against the mission it seeks to achieve. Displacement, rent-burden, and housing instability all dramatically reduce health outcomes for affected residents, making it even harder for families to pay for healthy food or keep up on bills (Sandel et al. 2017). Even Yale Medicine and Yale School of Public Health researchers have confirmed the link between displacement, evictions, and poor health outcomes (Keene et al. 2018). A hospital development seeking to support community health must ensure it does not inadvertently lead to this. Yale-New Haven has not yet provided such a plan.

The evidence suggests that building this kind of hospital in a neighborhood like Dwight means that the people in the neighborhood might actually end up going to the hospital more often. We know Yale-New Haven does not want this, and neither do we.

To build community health in Dwight, we need an open and democratic development process, not occasional presentations at community management team meetings with limited collaboration. It is almost impossible to plan an equitable and responsible development of any scale, let alone one of almost a billion dollars, without grounding your plans in the knowledge, experiences, and ideas of residents who understand the neighborhood best. Like Yale-New Haven President and CEO Marna Borgstrom told Politico in 2017, supporting education, safe housing, and neighborhood strength alongside hospital developments is “just a no brainer.”

We want good health care in Dwight, but we don’t want it at the expense of the people who currently live in our neighborhood nor at the expense of the physical and social fabric of our community. We also don’t want to spend our time constantly battling development that should include us from the start. We would much rather spend our time collaborating on policies and plans that will prevent displacement and allow this hospital to be a hub for community health than on writing letters telling you to simply pursue research-based decisions and responsible development. We are ready to work for responsible and democratic development, to build on a foundation of evidence and experience, and to realize our hopes for a happy, healthy, and fair New Haven. Are you?

Sincerely,

Rasmus Schlutter, Yale College 2021, B.A. in Urban Studies.

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