



SWIC

SouthWest Improvement Council

NEWS RELEASE

Denver, Colorado

December 19, 2020

CONTACT: Larry Ambrose

LarrySWIC@gmail.com; 303.934.2268 (Office) 720.490.1991 (Cell)

News Conference: 11 AM, Monday December 21, 2020 via Zoom (See below for link)

Denver Mayor Hancock Ousts Non-profit Serving Seniors and At Risk Residents SouthWest Improvement Council Told It Must Leave Westwood Community Center

Under Hancock Administration order, SWIC, serving second most gentrifying neighborhoods in the US, must vacate home of thirty-three years at end of 2021

During the term of Mayor Michael Hancock, Denver had the largest share of its vulnerable neighborhoods that gentrified than all other cities in the United States but San Francisco. Now, it seems, he has no qualms in expelling one of the City's oldest human service nonprofit organizations, the SouthWest Improvement Council (SWIC), serving mostly Latino, Native American and Asian American Elders, from the City building which it has successfully operated at its own cost for 33 years.

Since 1988 SWIC has operated the Westwood Community Center at 1000 S. Lowell Blvd. The campus includes the Westwood Branch of the Denver Public Library and the Mile-High Early Learning Center. SWIC serves people from throughout metro Denver, but its focus is on Westwood and the neighborhoods of SW Denver: Mar Lee, Barnum, Barnum West, Valverde and Athmar Park. SWIC provides educational, wellness and social programs, free food, clothing and essentials for families, helps to keep elders safe, secure and stable in their homes and strives to improve the quality of life for all people in the community.

SWIC provides free daily meals, daily activities and programs for Senior citizens, a food pantry and gymnasium space for adult, youth and Denver Public School athletics programs, housing counseling and home buyer education.

Since the COVID pandemic, SWIC has continued to provide daily meals delivered to the homes of Elder clients and has grown its weekly food pantry to serve an estimated 200 food insecure families with quality groceries and personal, home and hygiene supplies.

SWIC was responsible for initiating and promoting a bond issue which built the Westwood Community Center in 2007. The City owns the building but SWIC built it with the promise of becoming the owner. Because of its role in creating the Center and established role as an anchor institution, SWIC was for many years told that it would be able to buy the building from the City and have a home of its own to continue its good works. There was a signed purchase option. In 2012, the City reneged on its promise. Despite many years of trying to negotiate a long term lease and direct appeals to Mayor Hancock the past two years, SWIC was notified by his Administration it must vacate at the end of 2021.

No reason or explanation has been given. No alternative use for the Community Center has been revealed. The City has only said there are other non-profit organizations which need space and there are likely better uses for the facility than the services which SWIC has provided to the community and its senior citizens for over 30 years. SWIC is a stabilizing factor against displacement and gentrification. SWIC provides affordable housing, housing counseling, food and supplies which help residents stay in their homes.

The action by the City comes at a time when SWIC has been pressed by the COVID pandemic to address increasing numbers of families experiencing food insecurity. Over the past 6 months of pandemic, SWIC has provided more than 200 families an estimated 80,000 pounds of groceries and supplies during 2,500 visits.

The SWIC expulsion adds to the Hancock Administration's abysmal record of gentrification of Denver's neighborhoods. According to a recent study by the Washington, D.C.-based National Community Reinvestment Coalition, Denver was the second most gentrified City in the United States between 2013 and 2017, second only to San Francisco. Gentrifying neighborhoods involves an inflow of young affluent people into communities of color who have longstanding family ties to the areas being transformed.

Join us for a Zoom News Conference held by **SWIC at 11 am on Monday, December 21, 2020** to give further details on the actions of the City, to answer questions and to talk about SWIC's options for the future.

###

Zoom News Conference

Topic: News Conference on Denver Mayor Michael Hancock Ousting SW Denver Human Services Nonprofit

Time: Monday, Dec 21, 2020 11:00 AM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84016131743>

Meeting ID: 840 1613 1743

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kzEq1Rr5l>

One tap mobile

Meeting ID: 840 1613 1743

Phone in: +1 253 215 8782