



SWIC
SouthWest Improvement Council

NEWS RELEASE

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Denver City Council Finance Committee Asked to Table Westwood Community Center Short-term Lease Approval

Mayor Expands Homeless Sweeps to Include Nonprofit Organization Being Swept Out

Tuesday January 5, 2021, the Denver City Council Finance Committee is being asked by the Hancock Administration Real Estate Division to approve a short term lease forcing the 33 year old SouthWest Improvement Council (SWIC) to vacate the Westwood Community Center at 1000 S. Lowell Blvd. at the end of 2021. The Board of Directors of SWIC has sent a letter to the Committee members asking them to table their approval until the City reveals why SWIC is being evicted and advocate for a longer lease term.

Having designed, built, operated, and maintained the buildings since 1988, the City agreed in 2010 to a Lease with Option to Purchase that SWIC could buy the building in 2012. Since that time, the City has kept SWIC in the dark and on a month to month lease. The City has not allowed SWIC to exercise the option. The Real Estate Division has not been transparent in dealing with SWIC. The lease presented to the Committee for approval is only for one year, requires that SWIC submit lengthy detailed reports every three months and still requires them to move the end of December this year.

In asking the Finance Committee to approve the lease the Real Estate Division revealed that it plans to undertake an RFP process after SWIC is evicted. No reason has been given as to why SWIC is being forced to move out, leaving the building empty and then being given the opportunity to bid against complementary or competing organizations to win the right to move back in. The SWIC Board has said that this action is completely unjustifiable and lacking any rational basis.

In addition, the City has not considered how SWIC will be able to continue the services which SWIC provides for primarily Latino, Native American and Asian American seniors or what services it expects to require from those who it is "inviting" to bid on operating the Community Center after SWIC is forced out. The SWIC Board letter alleges that "Forcing SWIC to move and then allowing SWIC to bid on coming back to an emptied building is oppressive and unjustifiable."

The Westwood Community Center campus includes the Westwood Branch of the Denver Public Library and the Mile-High Early Learning Center. SWIC serves people from throughout metro Denver, with a focus on Westwood, 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 250 food insecure families with quality groceries and personal, home and hygiene supplies. 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.

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.

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.

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The Finance Committee is scheduled for a virtual meeting at 1:30 pm. The SWIC Lease Approval is third on the Agenda. The meeting can be watched live on Zoom at; https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Vwbg9VBCTPitrQVpMpAbkw with the password Denver.