

## Little Saigon in the Context of Surrounding Neighborhoods

**Little Saigon** comprises about a dozen blocks east of Downtown Seattle, separated from the rest of the International District by Interstate 5. After several waves of immigration, the neighborhood has become a stronghold of Vietnamese culture that draws people from all over County.

Historically an industrial zone, the neighborhood is today mostly a small business district. Following a recent update of the downtown area, its major challenges include providing affordable housing and maintaining commercial affordability to mitigate displacement.

As Little Saigon continues to grow and evolve, the preservation of its cultural heritage remains a priority.

The study region, highlighted in yellow at right, is representative of Little Saigon's urban form. These methods informed the analysis:

- Urban studies of observation, photography, and sketching
- Historic photographs and maps of street and block patterns
- Geospatial analysis referencing present-day maps
- Interview with An Huyhn and Jamie Lee of the Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation & Development Authority

To the west, Chinatown

One of the oldest city neighborhoods, now a National Historic District and home to immigrants of many nationalities.

To the north, Yesler Terrace Once a public housing project constructed in 1941, Yesler Terrace is being redeveloped into a dense mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood.

To the south, Beacon Hill This area contains a medical facility, state government offices, and older, single-family homes. Today, it has a large Asian population.

To the east, Central District Single-family homes dominate Seattle's large, historic African American neighborhood which is now facing extreme development pressure in a period of gentrification.

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## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### Regrading Jackson Street

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the elevation of this area was as high as Beacon Hill. At this time, long before the area earned the nickname Little Saigon, a vice district emerged south of Yesler Way.

The first settlers were Jewish and African American people, and most of the buildings were of wood-frame construction. However, this area experienced a significant change with the Jackson Street Regrade between 1908 and 1914. Of all the regrade projects in Seattle during this era, this was one of the largest, changing the elevation of 56 city blocks.

The figure at right shows how the street between 6th and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenues was dramatically lowered, increasing the area's accessibility. The regrade allowed better access from farms in the Rainier Valley to markets in town, leading to subsequent commercial and industrial development.

Regrade elevation of Jackson Street between 6th and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenues, circa 1909.

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