

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL
C/O 4534 UNIVERSITY WAY NE
SEATTLE, WA 98105
udistrictcommunitycouncil.org

March 17, 2025

Dr. Sara Nelson

Chair of Governance, Accountability & Economic Development Committee, Councilmember Position 9
Seattle City Council
P O Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: Letter in Support of Small Businesses and in Opposition to Corporate Chains on The Ave

Dear Councilmember Nelson,

The University District is defined by its abundance of legacy small businesses, which give our main street its unique charm and vitality. One such business, **Cedars of Lebanon**, one of the oldest restaurants on The Ave, is being displaced after five decades—to make room for a McDonald's.

Replacing three independent small businesses with a block-wide corporate chain façade directly across from the entrance to our main light rail station is deeply concerning.

Why This Matters

The strength of our community lies in its locally-owned businesses, diverse demographics, and walkable core. The Ave's human-scaled building heights, historic character, and narrow storefronts foster an inclusive, thriving small business economy. These businesses keep profits local, employ our residents, and sustain our neighborhood's identity.

A 2017 **Vulnerability Study** (udistrict.org/study) of **123 small businesses** along The Ave revealed:

- 65% are BIPOC- or woman-owned
- 70% employ minority or immigrant workers
- 90% rent their space (15% are on month-to-month leases)
- Half have storefronts of 25 feet or less
- All are at high risk of displacement

This vulnerability is not just theoretical—chains that pay premium leases often fail on The Ave, leaving behind vacant storefronts. Past failures include Target, CVS, Starbucks (north store), and even the original McDonald's. An empty anchor at such a prominent transit hub sends the wrong message—that the U District is struggling, rather than thriving.

How You Can Help

Beyond existing city programs, we ask you to consider policies like San Francisco's [Formula Retail Regulations](#), which protect the vibrancy of small business districts by regulating chain store expansion. We welcome your ideas and look forward to collaborating on productive solutions.

For over 50 years, the **University District Community Council (UDCC)** has represented the interests of our diverse residents, workers, business owners, property owners, and students. With the U District rapidly

transforming into a high-rise regional center, with 5,000-7,000 new households expected in the next decade, we must act now to preserve what makes our neighborhood unique and independent.

Help Us Keep the U District Unique!

Thank you for your support.



Cory Crocker, President

cc: Bruce Harrell, Mayor of Seattle
Robert Kettle, Vice-Chair of Governance, Accountability & Economic Development Committee, Councilmember 7th District
Maritza Rivera, Chair of Libraries, Education & Neighborhoods Committee, Councilmember 4th District
Alexis Mercedes Rinck, Vice-Chair of Libraries, Education & Neighborhoods Committee, Councilmember Position 8
Mark Solomon, Chair of Land Use Committee, Councilmember 2nd District
Dan Strauss, Vice-Chair of Land Use Committee, Councilmember 6th District
Don Blakeney, Director, U District Partnership
Ben Peha, Landlord, Mercantile Rhodes LLC
John Khalil, Cedars of Lebanon
Joe Erlinger, President, McDonald's USA