Summary: The new high rise buildings and proposed projects in the Sugar House area are thought by many to be leading to the destruction of the Sugar House village character. Parking and traffic and rents will get worse and many question whether that is a good thing.

The Super gentrification of Sugar House

Many residents have complained about the destruction of the character of Sugar House. A couple of years ago, the Sugar House Community Council and Salt Lake City adopted a Circulation and Management Plan that was supposed to encourage the “village character” of Sugar House with buildings that were no bigger than three stories, encouraging small developments, more small side streets and wider sidewalks. One result was the closing of the right hand turn lane from 2100 South to Highland Drive and the building of a pedestrian plaza.

Recent project proposals for the Sugar House area seem to drive the nails into the coffin that was Sugar House village concept. Proposals include a ten story building half a block from single-family homes, a high rise office building on Highland Drive and a proposal for more than 100 apartments on 2100 South at 1000 East. These proposals join the high rises already constructed in the area. The result of all of these high rises will make walking through the neighborhood like walking in a canyon of concrete and steel. The views of the mountains and even sunlight will be hard to come by.

The rents on these new projects are two to three times the regular rents of apartments in the area ($600). When rents increase significantly, it hurts the shops and residents that create the character of an area. Significantly increasing rents in an area can result in a form of elder abuse. Salt Lake City Councilman Stan Penfold recently expressed concern that all this new construction may be driving out the local small businesses that we should be protecting. Ironically, Stan Penfold was chair of the SLC RDA that encouraged much of the new development in Sugar House.

The other problem with large scale development is the increase in traffic and lack of sufficient parking. Even the U.S. Post Office on 1100 East implemented paid parking after hours! Previously, shoppers to the area would park and be able to walk to the shops and restaurants and spend four or five hours enjoying Sugar House. That pollution saving action is no longer available in Sugar House. Even parking at the Sugar House Sprague library is limited to two hours. A library should be more welcoming and not limit meetings and reading to two hours. Businesses nearby with parking lots had to start enforcing their customer only policies due to the lack of parking in the area.

With new construction, walkability and parking will get even worse. Nearby residents will have to endure construction workers parking. Parking will get even worse on completion due to Salt Lake City’s questionable parking requirements. The SLC late last year doubled the requirement for parking but also indicated that it may need to be increased further. Projects that provide only limited onsite parking, or require paid parking for residents and businesses, force nearby businesses and residents to suffer for inadequate parking. Until reasonable parking standards for projects are implemented, new projects will create parking and traffic problems wherever they are built. Reasonable requirements should address maximum occupancy for the neighborhood when considering traffic and parking impacts.

A new proposal to significantly increase density is the Sugar House Streetcar Corridor Master Plan. It generally limits construction to 45 feet but allows some buildings to go to 75 feet (105 feet if 20% of units are affordable). The plan also recommends the removal of two lanes of traffic on 700 East, south of 2100 South.

The SLC’s lack of appropriate parking standards will impact residential neighborhoods and the increased traffic will hurt neighborhood character. Instead of a village character, we are ending up with the super gentrification of Sugar House. The SLC Council will have a public hearing on the new plan on May 24th.

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