Honorable Mayor Matta and Burien City Council Members,

The Chamber is a long-time advocate for both business and workers as the most important economic resource we have in our community, are the people that live and work here. Housing has always been a policy priority for us as we know we need more housing, of all housing types to support both business and workers.

The Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce–along with Discover Burien–launched a survey March 25th, in English and Spanish asking residents and business owners to take part in a short, online survey about the proposed DESC affordable housing project in Burien.

The purpose of the survey was to seek feedback on DESC affordable housing project in Burien. Although several ZOOM meetings were held, small businesses are incredibly busy, especially now with COVID-19, and we wanted to provide a quick and easy way for businesses to share their thoughts with you, our policy makers.

As an independent nonprofit service organization, we focus on Economic Development and Community Engagement because we know how important working together is. It is in that spirit of collaboration and information sharing that we wanted to provide another opportunity for the business community to provide their thoughts and feedback to the council.

From March 25th through April 1st, we received 274 responses, 269 in responses to the English version and 5 responses to the Spanish version. As this policy issue is ongoing, we are simply providing preliminary results at this time and will leave the survey open until April 12th so that those that have not had time to participate are able to do so. The links to the survey is as follows: [English version](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DESC-Response) and [Spanish version](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DESC-Response-Spanish).

All responses collected were anonymous with the option to provide contact information. One comment noted: “I will not share my information because I know Renton business owners who opposed a similar project run by DESC were targeted and harassed.”

The following is a sample preview of preliminary results:

* 11.15% (30 individuals) self-identified as business owners in support of the project
* 22.30% (60 individuals) self-identified as business owners in opposition of the project
* 14.49% (39 individuals) self-identified as non-business owners in support of the project
* 22.68% (61 individuals) self-identified as non-business owners in opposition of the project
* 40.15% (110 individuals) self-identified as business owners
* 25.18% (69 individuals) identified as having attended an information session
* 86.86% (238) identified as reviewed the information available
* 38.69% (106 individuals) identified as in support of the project
* 45.26% (124 individuals) identified as in opposition of the project
* 2.92% (8 individuals) identified as not having an opinion of the project
* 13.14% (36 individuals) identified as wanting or needing more information before an opinion could be registered

In the responses, 58.39% (160 individuals) left additional questions or comments.

* 48.75% (78 comments) stated or implied opposition of the project
* 26.62% (42 comments) stated or implied support of the project
* 25.00% (40 comments) stated or implied no opinion with many requests for more information

Examples of “Opposition” Responses:

* “I full support adding supportive housing in Burien, but I'm not sure DESC is the best organization to do it. I wish the city were doing more to actively recruit other organizations so we could have our pick of providers.”
* “I understand that DECA (sic) has had some serious issues at other facilities they have run. I am very much against the height of this building project as well as it being so close to the restaurants and businesses that are small owner run and struggling. Anything that takes away from their business or perceived safety is of paramount concern for the long term vitality of Burien. We in the South King county area are often the "dumping" ground for difficult housing and organizations. It was one of the main reasons we became a city, so as to have more say in what we look like and to ensure safety. I am concerned if this is built that our police and social services will be further stretched and we the taxpayers will see have to shoulder the financial and social burden. Our police are already asked to do so much more, let's not add to that or the fire dept. efforts”
* “I am not opposed to a DESC project but I am against having this kind of project in the Burien core. Revitalization of the Burien core has been having some success and this kind of project would be detrimental. There must be other more suitable areas. I have heard the argument that it needs to be near basic services and I maintain there must be other areas on a bus route that would serve well.”
* “I'm very concerned about this project and what it will do to our already deteriorating community.
* “Having on-site drug use tolerated and people with unmonitored health issues - especially after recent gun violence in public spaces. Who's going to provide the extra security for our residents. This is a ridiculous proposal and shows that the Burien planning committee is ignorant and has no business making decisions like this that will put our children and other residents at risk.”

Examples of “Support” Responses:

* “I would enthusiastically support this effort, and especially if we had assurance some spots would be for Current Burien folks.”
* “I answer yes, but I have concerns. I have heard stories of similar housing where the facilities are consistently flooded by overflowing toilets, sprinkler systems that are set off and damage to the buildings. Other stories include theft of businesses, violence on citizens, and drug dealing in the immediate area of the housing and traced back to residents. I believe that having our communities' homeless population being housed is better than having them live on the streets. I believe homeless who have mental illness and drug addiction should have access to treatment and resources. I do not believe all homeless people will be able to enter the work force or become independent and therefore we should offer services that keep them housed even if they cannot work and financially support their own housing. So, in general, I support this. I would like assurances that the management of this building and the resources for the residents will not devolve into a "drug house" or be a place that degrades the quality of life for everyone living in Burien. I believe it is possible to have this housing option become a beacon of hope for the homeless in Burien.”
* “Supportive Housing is evidence-based and works to reduce the burden of homelessness not only on those living outside but on the community as well. It's the most cost effective and humane solution to this issue and should be implemented in every town across Washington.”
* “I am so glad they are building affordable housing in Burien for people who need it. I hope that other wealthier cities like Bellevue, Medina, Beaux Arts, Clyde Hill, Yarrow Point, etc also do their part to support affordable housing so that the work and impacts are distributed more equitably in the future. I think that the City of Burien should continue engaging at the regional level on issues of equity like this since many of the problems stem from resource-hoarding by wealthier individuals (e.g. persistent wage theft and labor violations by Amazon managers who live in these wealthy areas). Thank you.”

Examples of “No Opinion” Responses:

* “Being a mental health professional and familiar with Harm Reduction, working with homeless populations requires workers to have a good understanding of comorbidity. Many downtown agencies are overrun with homeless populations that have substance abuse issues that resort to crime to feed their addiction. The people employed at these organizations will not have enough support and the necessary training to manage a large population of comorbid DESC housing individuals. Additionally, they will not receive the necessary support from DESC, resign and leave these individuals unsupported.”
* “There needs to be more discussion and communication about the concerns from the business community and community at large. That will help identify the major worries that need to be addressed proactively. We are see the problem everyday and have no sense that the real issues that are driving the homelessness and income inequality is being addressed. What sort of services will be provided and how are those planned for and budgeted? More communication and listening can help provide a more well-rounded program that has wide community support for the long term.”
* “I believe in supportive housing and housing first efforts. I do have concerns about the scale of this proposal. I think 96 units is a large concentrate group for our small downtown. Additional concerns. I'm curious about staffing on the property. Does their staff make a living wage? Does that job also provide health care and support. I am a MH care provider and I know these jobs are very unsupported and have high burn out levels. A mask of staff support, ultimately equals a lack of resident support. How many staff on the property. How will you make this a safe and sustainable job?”
* “Have only heard of it through the Nextdoor app, nothing on the news or other media until receiving this email for the survey. I think you need to do more to educate residents about this proposed project.”

Of those that supported the project the top 3 reason were:

1. Decrease homelessness in Burien
2. Compassion
3. Improve the community

Of those that opposed the project the top 3 reasons were:

1. Location
2. Crime
3. Prior examples (i.e. Renton)

One of the assessments from reviewing comments is just how emotional and passionate the community is about permanent supportive housing and those experiencing homelessness in our region.

We hope to encourage and participate in more education and outreach and to continue to be a resource for all in our community striving to build collaborative partnerships and find creative solutions to the complex and regional solutions are community face. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a brief window into the current thoughts and sentiments active in our community and please let us know how we can continue to participate and engage in this work.

Sincerely,

Andrea H. Reay

President/CEO

Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce