



Codman Square Neighborhood Business District

Impressions of Business Owners and Managers

Summary of Interviews Conducted
November and December 2020

Introduction

Methodology

In collaboration with the Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation (CSNDC), the Urban Action Lab run by Neil McCullagh at Boston College sought to better understand the concerns of small businesses in the Codman Square Business District and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business community. With the support of Dr. Samantha Teixeira and Josh Lown from the Boston College School of Social Work, students developed an interview protocol. Dr. Teixeira and Josh Lown trained six undergraduate students to take part in in the Urban Action Lab, using the proper qualitative interview process. These six students interviewed nine Codman Square business owners. Transcripts for each interview were written and provided by the students. Students learned how to code transcripts using thematic coding, with the assistance of Josh Lown. Josh Lown then grouped the coded transcripts to find common themes across interviews. Using this information, Josh Lown completed the following report.

CSNDC *“Being a business owner in the community, to see a development like [CSNDC] checking on you, making sure even with the Covid they’re checking on you, asking are you okay? How is the business doing? You know it says a lot about the community and the people who monitor the community, you know, the care and spirit.”*

Worries About Change *“I feel like no outsider should be, um, in my neighborhood. No big companies - anybody heu h eg eln*

Economic Constraints

The economic constraints described by business owners revolved almost entirely around the impact of COVID-19 on their businesses. Participants described having to decrease the number of staff they had working or decrease the hours and services they offered. Companies have been double impacted for months by closures and by serving customers who are struggling financially and are less able to shop in the community.

Restaurant owners began to rely on technology and service delivery apps, such as UberEATS and Grubhub, more than ever before to keep their businesses running. Business owners recognized the importance of more substantial financial and technological literacy due to the pandemic. They are interested in increasing training opportunities to leverage technology to boost their business.

Pandemic Economy “...we could tell it was declining, gradually declining. And even in Thanksgiving, like the day before Th

Hopes for the Future

Aside from the suggestions for beautification of the community surrounding and including businesses, small business owners in Codman Square voiced their concerns about how the neighborhood was changing and the types of companies currently existing and coming in to the community. Participants noted that there are empty storefronts that they would like to see occupied with new, diverse businesses. According to participants, restaurants saturate the market, and many spoke explicitly to the need for more healthy food options in the area. The residents' commitment to maintain local ownership, particularly Black ownership, is a significant hope for the future. The support and advancement of local- and Black-owned businesses seems to be felt strongly across the community, with the idea that through this support, Codman Square can work toward building political and financial power for the community. According to interviewees, there are still many unmet resident needs, and involving residents in this process will help address those needs.

Expanding the Current Retail Offerings *“...people are running away from the rents, and they are not doing anything,*

Promoting the Neighborhood

Including the Neighborhood

Conclusion

Small business owners convey loyalty to the area and to community members. This sentiment is reflected in their expression of hope for the Codman Square Business District. Even as they discuss challenges faced by the Business District, such as disorganization and crime, these challenges are not considered the “fault of the community” nor are they considered insurmountable. Participants see the opportunity to develop and implement solutions by involving the community.

Two prime concerns expressed by business owners were local control over the development decisions and the inclusion and advancement of local- and Black-owned business. Participants want to see more businesses in the Codman Square Business District, especially if they are owned by residents.

COVID-19 has had a markable impact on the financial well-being of the Codman Square Business District. Businesses reduced