Field Research Task 2: Mapping the Community

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MENTAL MAPPING

The significance of place can carry a massive variety of meanings and values for different people. For some, an area can carry the meaning of a broad idea, or a detailed image. With this in mind, when studying the West U-District, each person on our team as well as a few interviewees were asked to describe the West U-District through mental mapping. The boundaries our team has set for our project in the West U-District consists of NE 45th St in the north end, and NE 40th St in the south end, as well as I-5 to the west and University Way/The Ave to the east. Upon collecting all the maps, our team came together to create a summary map of the mental maps in order to draw conclusions about the area from a general perspective. It is critical to understand that the practice of mental mapping documents what comes to mind when one is asked to remember and draw out what the area looks like. In other words, mental mapping highlights the elements of a place that are noteworthy to its visitors and inhabitants, allowing outsiders and planners to better understand a location, its components, and its constituents.

Our team compiled a set of mental maps which consisted of residents of the U-District as well as our own mental maps. Individually, these maps reflect the person's view on the U-District. However, compiling the maps together helps identify trends relevant to the place's key features and locations. On the surface, these trends may be ordinary influences to people who frequent the area. However, some of these trends may also be foundational to the place's existence and reputation.

Mental maps were collected during interviews with 5 people, who were chosen because they lived in or near the West U-District and were friends or peers of the research team. An attempt to interview individuals not known to the researchers was made, but was unsuccessful due to people being unwilling to take the time for an interview or to draw a mental map for multiple reasons. Each of the 5 interviewees are current UW students, and there is a wide variety of how long each person has been in the U-District, with the exception of one interviewee who is not a resident but frequently visits the neighborhood. The longest tenured resident among the interviewees has been in the neighborhood for 5 years. Two student-residents who are currently in their 3rd and 4th years of school have been living in U-District West for 2 years. Lastly, one interviewee had been living in the West U-District since 2018, but moved back to their hometown due to covid, and had thus lived in the neighborhood for less than 2 years.

Referring to Fig. 1, the map highlights most of the places mentioned in the interviewees mental maps as well as researcher's own mental maps. A few places were omitted from the heat map due to it being too far from the boundary lines, or because the writing was illegible to read. Most noted places on the heat map were mentioned only 1 to 2 times, while the most recognizable places included Gould Hall, Aladdin's Gyrocery, and the Burke-Gilman Trail. 10

places were mentioned 3-4 times among the mental maps. The most notable places were the UW Bookstore, Trader Joe's, Petco, Arts and Craftsman, Portage Bay Cafe, and West Campus. Only two places were marked more than 5 times on all 10 mental maps (5 from interviewees, 5 from researchers). Interstate 5 was mentioned on most of the mental maps, and Trinity Market was mentioned on 6 maps.

Upon further analysis of each mental map, many similarities, differences, and patterns emerged. The main differences between the mental maps were the areas and boundaries created by each individual, even though map boundaries were specified for what we considered the West U-District. Meaning that each person had different areas of the U-District that they considered their own neighborhood, regardless of it being within our assigned boundaries or not. However, for the maps that actually were within the assigned boundaries, they all had different and smaller boundaries that were oriented towards their perspective and perceptions. In terms of similarities, the mental maps were mostly oriented or centered around the map maker's home in the U-District, with the exception of two interviewees and a researcher who have not been residents of the neighborhood. Another similarity and pattern of the mental maps were the inclusions of other places of housing, which generally were places where their friends or other acquaintances currently live or they have lived in previously. All of the maps have included places that involve food, grocery stores such as Trader Joe's, favorite or important restaurants on the Ave, and Trinity Market, the neighborhood convenience store. More observations on the mental maps shows a strong lack of green spaces mentioned in the maps. Green space in the West U-District is limited to Christie Park, Peace Park, U-District Community P-Patch Garden, and the Campus Parkway median, all of which are relatively small and few of which provide significant amenities to park users. There is also an absence of mentioned bus stops or routes on the mental maps, however the new U-District Link Light Rail station was mentioned 3-4 times instead.

When interviewing people about their concerns for the neighborhood, most of the concerns mentioned by the interviewees were quite similar or the same. One of the major concerns being a lack of safety in the neighborhood, as there has been an increase in crimes over the past few months. Safety is also affected by the lack of lighting in some of the areas of the neighborhood, and that another issue tied with safety is the overall cleanliness of the neighborhood as trash is commonly littered throughout the neighborhood. Another concern of the neighborhood is with street parking, how the street parking is always full and makes the streets feel congested and are also easy targets for vandalism since windows tend to get smashed. Lastly, there is a growing concern over the rise in rent costs in the neighborhood, prices are either going up or have gone up previously, making housing affordability difficult for current student residents such as the interviewees.

ASSET MAPPING

       Identifying the assets within a neighborhood is extremely crucial to understanding that neighborhood. The West U-District in Seattle, WA is no exception to this. This neighborhood has a large variety of assets spread throughout it. Identifying what those assets are as well as trends that they reveal is very valuable in understanding the neighborhood as a whole. Fig. 2 shows the total inventory of assets in the West U-District.

       Taking a closer look at the businesses, the West U-District has a lot to offer. These businesses can be split into three different categories: restaurants, retail, and professional. Restaurants are the second most common business type in this neighborhood with 66 locations. The proximity to the University of Washington is likely a large factor for this high volume because the college student demographic uses restaurants more than other demographics. The restaurants in this neighborhood are very diverse in what they offer to their consumers. They serve food from many places across the world, but Asian restaurants seem to be the most common. Moving on, the retail sector of this neighborhood is the smallest of the sectors, but there is still a sizable presence in the area with 22 locations. These retail locations range from grocery stores to shoe stores and other miscellaneous forms of retail. The final sector of business in the West U-District is the professional sector. This is the largest sector with slightly more locations, 71, than restaurants. These professional businesses range from medical institutions to salons and anything else that provides a general service. These businesses provide such a large variety of assets to the neighborhood and it is good to see that there is a large presence.

       The next asset to talk about is the housing available in the neighborhood. The majority of the neighborhood is made up of residential buildings, and the scope of these have been heavily influenced by the University. Most of these residential buildings are apartment buildings and of the houses present, most have been converted into multiple unit residences. This type of housing caters much more to the younger demographic, which is why it is so much more prevalent than single family homes. Overall the West U-District has a large amount of housing available to its residents.

       Another extremely valuable asset to a neighborhood are service organizations and associations. These provide a specific service to a certain group of people for their benefit with some examples being food banks, homeless shelters, religious institutions, and cultural centers. The West U-District has several of these organizations spread throughout the neighborhood for the benefit of the residents. These assets provide so much to members of a neighborhood and their presence is very beneficial.

       Parks and green space is something that is highly valued in a neighborhood. Unfortunately with many neighborhoods being as dense as they are, parks and green space is often sacrificed for other assets. This seems to be the case with the West U-District as their presence is scarce throughout the neighborhood with there only being seven. Two of these are established parks with Christie Park, at the corner of NE 43rd St and 9th Ave NE, and Peace Park, the median of NE 40th St and the rest are little pockets of green space. The more dense a neighborhood is, the more valuable green space and parks become and the West U-District could benefit from more of them.

       Accessible transportation is very important for a neighborhood and while asset mapping this neighborhood, there were a few things to note. The first is the high accessibility to sidewalks

throughout the neighborhood. Most of the area has sidewalks on both sides of the street with the only major exception being near I-5 in some areas. However, there is a large presence of construction in the area and this has caused some sidewalks to be temporarily closed. An example of this is on 12th Ave NE from NE 43rd St to NE 42nd St. Another thing to note in terms of accessible transportation is the presence of bike lanes on the streets. Most of the streets in this neighborhood are open to bikes, but there are only a few that have an individual bike lane. This could cause some safety concerns for bikers and cars alike. The final noteworthy transportation assets are the presence of bus stops in the neighborhood. These are spread throughout and provide easy transportation to many of the residents.

Taking a broader look at all of the assets within the West U-District reveals some overall trends that can be seen in the neighborhood, Fig. 3. The first of these is that the business sector is focused in the eastern portion of the neighborhood along University Way and the northern portion along 45th St. There are a few outliers to this, but overall the businesses are concentrated along these corridors. The other noticeable trend is that the residential sector is focused along the western and southern edges of the neighborhood. These sectors are quite segregated in the neighborhood with not much overlap.

While mapping the assets within a neighborhood's boundaries is extremely important, it is also important to know the assets that are right outside that neighborhood. For the West U-District, there are a few valuable assets that are located right outside the boundaries of the neighborhood. The first of these is the Burke-Gilman Trail. The trail runs along the southern border of the neighborhood and provides a safe form of transportation for bikes and pedestrians. Another example of an asset near the neighborhood is Roots Young Adult Center. It is located northeast of the West U-District and is a homeless shelter for youth and young adults. The final example of an asset located outside the neighborhood is the University of Washington. It sits just east of the neighborhood and has a massive influence on the neighborhood because it is a big reason why a lot of residents live in this neighborhood. Sometimes the assets that are located outside the boundaries of a neighborhood can have just as much if not more of an impact on the neighborhood as a whole.

The West U-District is full of assets to the members of the community and these assets come in numerous different forms and while there are some assets that have a powerful presence, there are also some that could stand to have more of a presence. Taking an inventory of these assets is the first step in identifying what can be improved and figuring out what is next.

DEMOGRAPHIC MAPPING

The West U-District is an apartment-dominated, primarily residential area close to I-5 and to the University of Washington. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 95% of its residents are renters rather than homeowners, and approximately 50% of its residents are enrolled in higher education. The area we defined as the West U-District (a rectangle bordered by NE 45th St t, 15th Ave NE, NE 40th St, and I-5) sits at the intersection of three census tracts, which also encompass areas of Ravenna and Wallingford – neighborhoods that differ drastically from the U-District in their capital, demographics, and built environment. Thus, although some conclusions could be drawn from data available at the census tract level, demographic data was most informative when it was available at the block level. Data from the 2010 US Census (visualized using Statistical Atlas) provided detailed information about West U-District residents' age and race

demographics, and offered lower-resolution – but nonetheless informative – information about income, education, and national background.

Across the U-District as a whole, about 50% of residents are between the ages of 18 and 21. Block-level data shows that the college age population is concentrated on campus and immediately north of campus, where 70-100% of students are college-aged (Fig 3). In the West U-District, block data shows student populations ranging from 15% to 58% in all residential blocks, with higher numbers correlating with clusters of lower-cost apartment buildings.

Block-level census data shows that the West U-District is, on average, about 60% White and 30% Asian (compared to around 80% White and 10% Asian in the North U-District, which is also student-dominated) (Fig 4). About 10% of residents of the North and the West U-District were not White or Asian. The neighborhoods surrounding the U-District are 80-90% White, which is in line with much of North Seattle. The difference between the North and West may be related to a preponderance of international students, but because national origin data is only available at the tract level, it is not entirely clear. Because the tract that crosses I-5 and includes both single-family homes in Wallingford and apartments in the West U-District has a similar percentage of foreign-born residents as other tracts in the U-District (about 35%), it is likely that there is a higher percentage of foreign-born residents living in the apartments close to I-5, rather than across the freeway in the predominantly-white Wallingford neighborhood (Fig 5).

The summary map, which complements the census data maps derived from Statistical Atlas, illustrates how different features of the West U-District's built environment influence and interact with its localized demographics (Fig 6). Residences fall into three main categories: old single-family homes, older low/mid-rise apartment buildings, and new mid-rise apartments. Analysis of the block-level data demonstrates a weak correlation between more affordable housing stock and higher student populations, but – especially in the West U-District when compared to other parts of the U-District – older populations are also present in many of these buildings, likely attracted by the low rent and proximity to public transit. However, the main information captured in the summary map that is deeply relevant to the character and trajectory of the West U-District is its focus on proposed- and under-construction mid- and high-rise residential towers, which is visualized using data from Seattle in Progress. Zoning changes, a growing urban population, and the new light rail station have all contributed to a spurt of local development. Currently, a total of 19 buildings over 11 stories are under consideration or construction in the West U District. An influx of expensive renter housing in the U-District will no doubt influence the demographics of the U-District, and alter its character at the street level.

SUMMARY

The U-District West area within our bounds is much as you'd expect a University District to be, consisting mostly of young adult students that live within the various ranges of multi-family homes, high rises, and mid-rises. Commercial and mixed use zoning allow for a high density living and this conglomerate of businesses that we all know and love. In addition to being densely populated with housing and business, this community is fortunate to possess parks, but could be improved through the use of underutilized parking spaces. There are chances for play but there is room to improve in this area considering just how much housing there is here. Organizations such as the UW Pantry and Facing Homelessness in this area address the socio-economic issues that are so very prevalent in our otherwise economically booming and

lively University District. This reveals that although through mapping we see a hefty total inventory of assets and a plethora of housing, there's still an issue of affordability in this area and we begin to question the effectiveness of the organizational assets to address the issue of homelessness in this community. Students mostly complain about safety in general, shaping the perception of this neighborhood to be unsafe and implies a feeling that this community is not a place to live, work, or play. There's lots of work to do on the ground to address this, and the wide availability of assets and opportunities can most definitely be leveraged to make West U-District that more desirable and equitable. Student engagement and proximity, of course, to the UW and its passionate set of CEP students could also be potential assets for preventing any critical socio-economic or built environment problems from getting any worse.
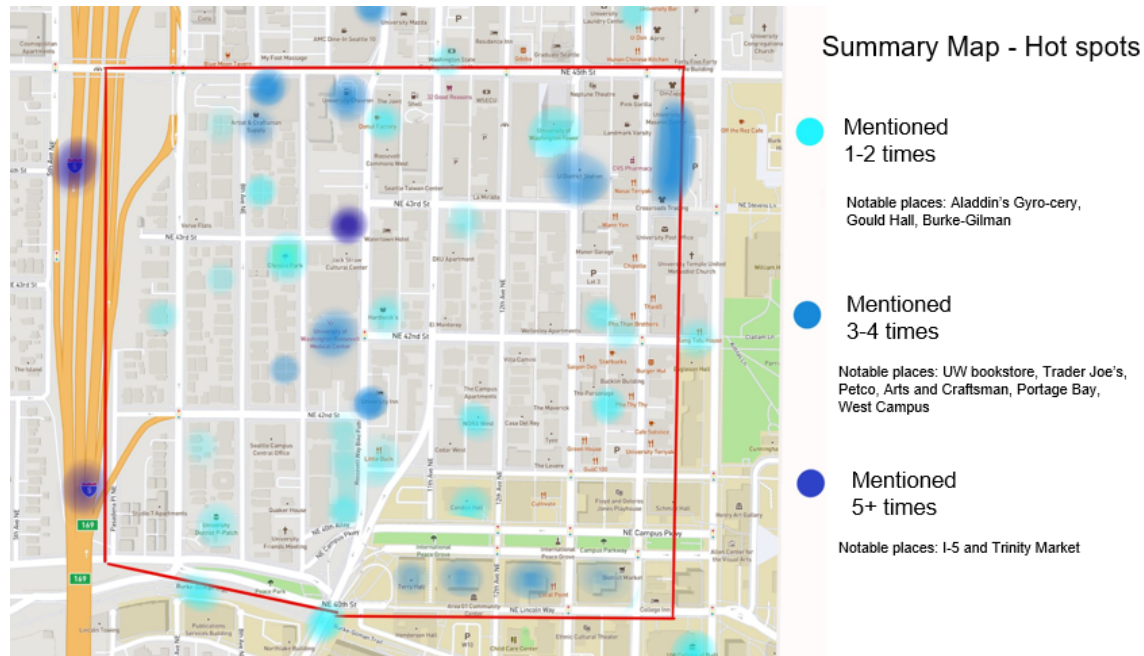
APPENDIX

Figure 1: Mental Mapping Summary - Hot Spots Heat Map

Total inventory	
Businesses	159
- Restaurant	66
- Retail	22
- Professional	71
Housing	196
- Houses	54
--- Single Family	15
--- Multiple Units	39
- Apartments	142
Parking Lots	18
Green Space and Parks	7
Transportation	21
Organizations	8

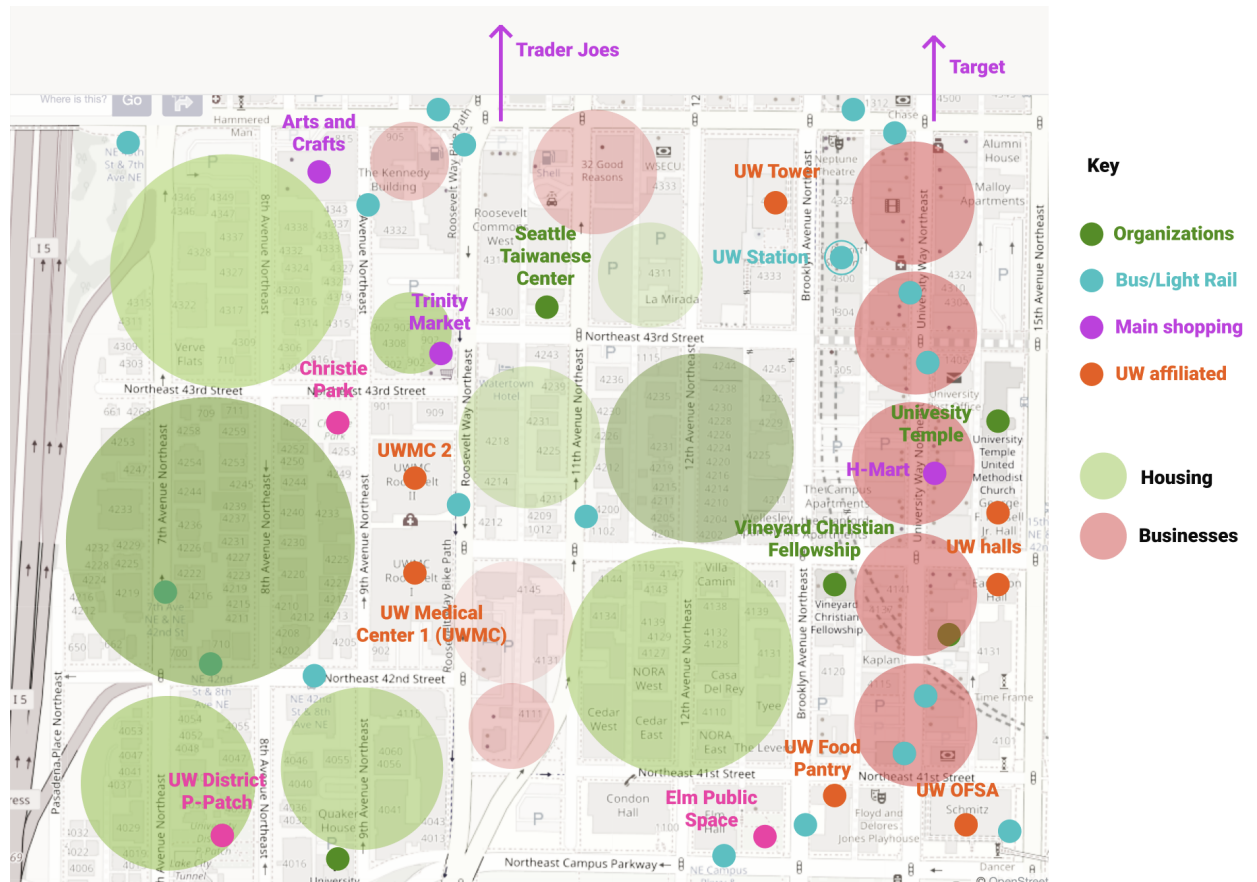*Figure 2: Total Inventory of Assets*

Figure 3: Asset map of U-District West within our designated bounds
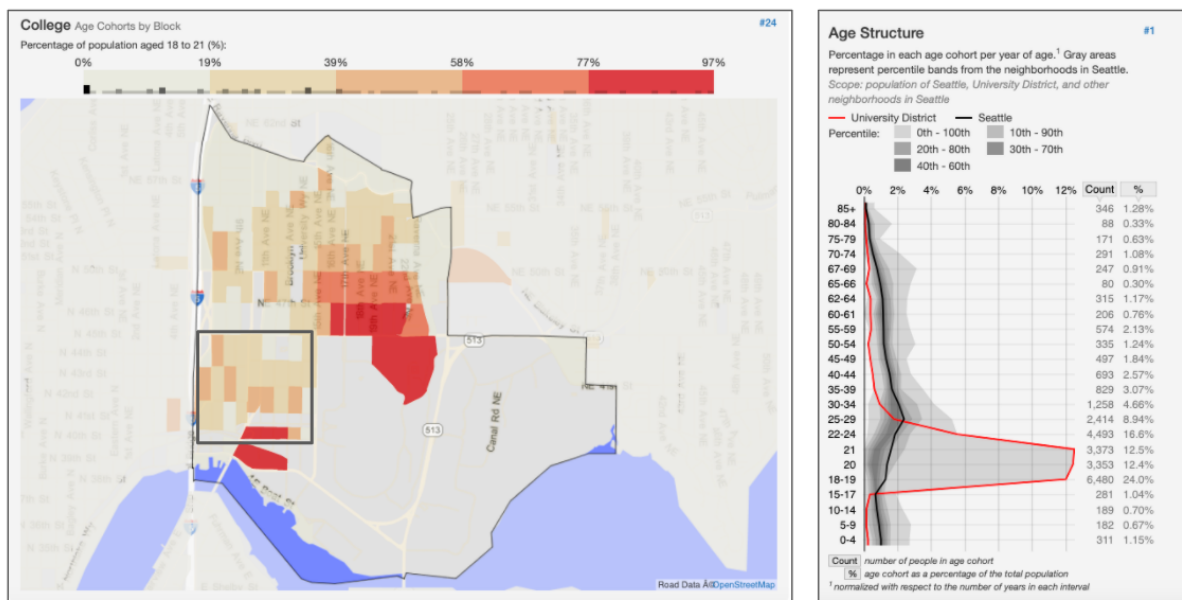

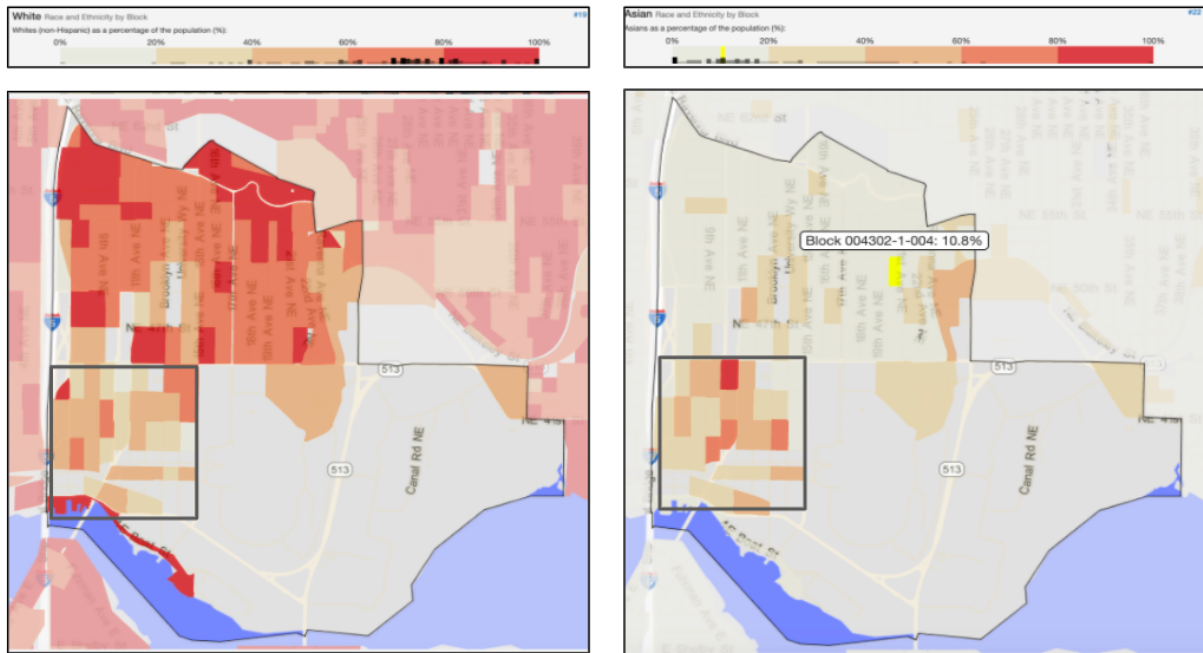*Figure 3: Age Demographics in the U-District.*

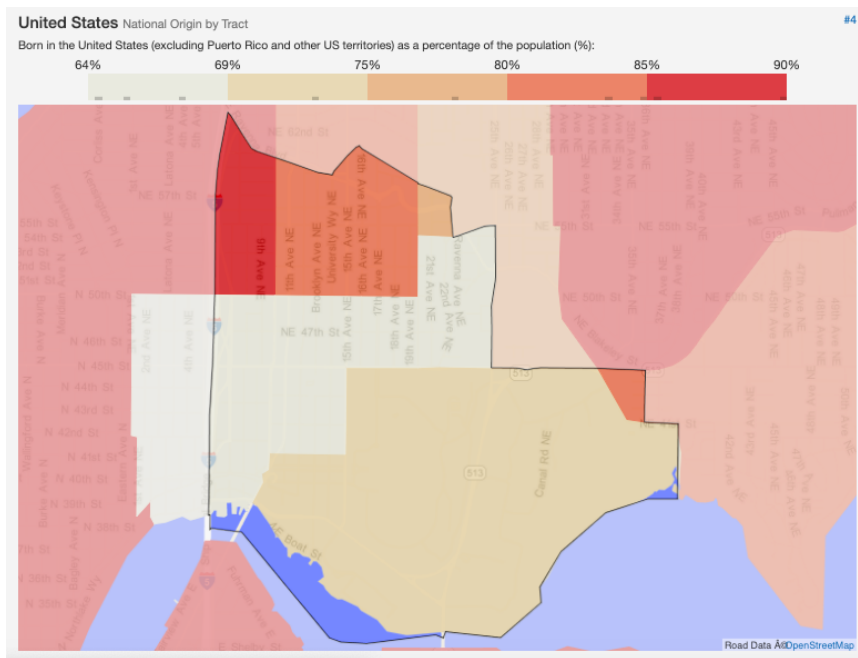*Figure 4: White and Asian Populations in the U-District.*

Figure 5: National Origin Data in the U-District.

West U-District: Demographics

Legend

- green space
- commercial avenues
- university property
- university housing
- single family homes
- mid-rise multifamily
- new & proposed mid-rise multifamily
- new & proposed high-rise multifamily

Neighborhood Demographics

52% white
36% asian
4% hispanic
2% black
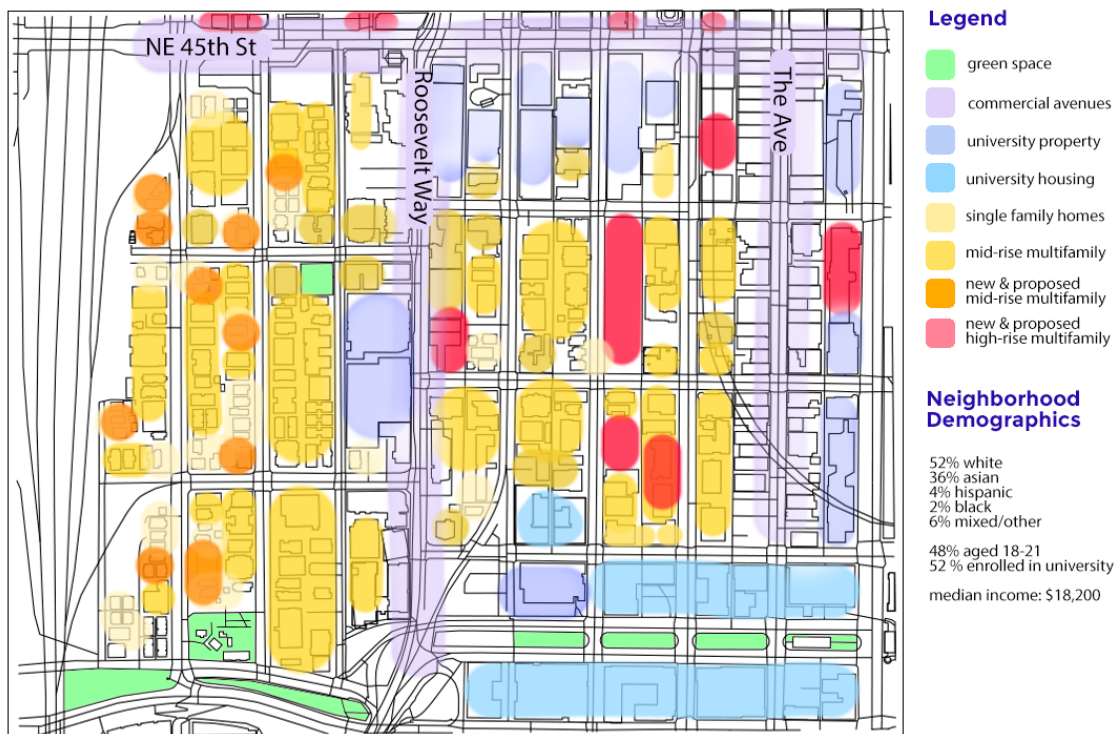6% mixed/other

48% aged 18-21
52 % enrolled in university

median income: $18,200

Figure 6: A Demographic Map of the West U-District.