

SEAMAAC Testimony on Council Resolution 200665

Andy Toy:

Good afternoon honorable Councilmen and women. Our names are Andy Toy, Community Development Director and Somaly Osteen, Commercial Corridor Manager, from the non-profit SEAMAAC, an organization that works with immigrant, refugee and marginalized communities mainly in South Philadelphia.

We are here to testify on Resolution 200665, about the work we are doing, and the needs of our struggling neighborhood commercial corridor and others during this especially challenging time.

The commercial corridor we manage is The S.7th Street Commercial Corridor from Porter to McKean streets that has over 60 small businesses, **all but one immigrant owned** and operated. This is one of the most diverse corridors in the city with Cambodian, Vietnamese, Mexican, Honduran, Dominican, Lao, Pakistanis, Korean, Burmese, Indonesian and Chinese business owners. The broader neighborhood is super diverse with around 1/3 Asian, 1/3 white and 1/3 African American and Latinx. However, the two main Census Tracts containing the 7th Street corridor are 43% Asian, 23% Latino, 22% White, 6% Black, and 6% two or more races.

Somaly Osteen:

These small businesses play critical roles in creating a vibrant community, a sense of safety, and economic opportunity.

Being an immigrant running a business is not normally easy with many rules, regulations and difficult access to capital. As a Cambodian immigrant myself, I understand how language limitations of business owners create many barriers. And lack of knowledge and technical skills make it even harder to navigate important paper work and grant applications - even more critical during Covid-19 pandemic. We also see businesses who are renting facing more challenges to keep their businesses open during this time of uncertainty so funding for property purchases is something to explore.

SEAMAAC has been able to help many of the 7th Street businesses apply for and receive grants during the pandemic. We know that other CDCs and non-profits are also making an important difference throughout the City in the same way. We are often the only connection between these businesses and resources they would not have access to. Funding applications should be simple and geared to smaller businesses. Some business owners do not have the technology required so we've been able to fill that need. As an example, our Honduran business owner, Lucio, could not send his hard copy tax returns electronically to the City with his application as required and had to have a lot of support with Spanish translation too. We actually had him take cell photos with his phone remotely, send them to us and we downloaded and pasted them all together in a pdf as an attachment to his application.

One other Program SEAMAAC began with some funding support was to create a Gift Certificate program for participating businesses on South 7th Street. This is our way of getting funds to businesses now, when they need it most. Our program allows customers to buy certificates on-line with a 50% match that all goes to the businesses. \$20 will get you a \$30 Certificate. We've provided \$16,000+ of Certificates so far and hope to sell more before Christmas. Please see our South 7th Street site for details or we can provide a direct link for those wanting to purchase Certificates to some of our delicious restaurants.

And we were just able to install some new decorative string LED lighting last week creating a festive atmosphere and greater sense of safety with more lighting. It looks good if you have a chance to get out there.

Andy Toy:

Cleanliness and safety are still important during the pandemic. Fortunately, thanks to the Commerce Department and Council support (Councilwoman Parker leading) our cleaning program is now 5 days per week and really makes a difference. Unfortunately, even with these improvements, we have still been having issues with drug dealers and prostitution as a result of the opioid crisis. Just this weekend there were two shootings on the corridor we believe related to the drug trade. We know the Police are stretched, but foot patrols are important for everyone to see and to build important relationships with the community.

In conclusion, we know that CDCs and other trusted organizations are important to the health of our neighborhood commercial corridors and businesses, and even more so during this difficult period. This is especially true for immigrant businesses, which are critical to our City and bring great diversity to our welcoming City. We know there is light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, but we all need to survive to get there. Corridor management work is even more critical. Now is the time to provide a last dose of support to both the businesses and those of us who are key lifeline connectors for them. Our commitment is to continue to serve these small businesses and the community to move forward to recovery. We can't do this without your support.