Strategies to Prevent Small Business Climate Displacement

SMALL BUSINESS Anti-Displacement Network

CASE STUDIES

Los Angeles | Miami | San Juan | Tribal Nations



About SBAN

The Small Business Anti-Displacement Network is a network of more than 200 organizations across the United States and abroad that advances policies and practices to help diverse small businesses grow and thrive in place. SBAN includes policymakers, nonprofit advocates, technical assistance providers, real estate developers, financial institutions, scholars, and small business owners, who work to build inclusive economies where locally owned, community-serving small businesses remain anchored, build wealth, and contribute to neighborhood culture and identity.

SMALL BUSINESS Anti-Displacement Network

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1. Little Haiti Cultural Complex and Caribbean Marketplace, the hub of Little Haiti's arts and cultural community in Miami.
2. Cynthia Trigo, owner of Moda Factory, a fashion and design business housed at Taller Comunidad La Goyco in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
3. Strategic Actions for a Just Economy staff canvassing and connecting commercial tenants with resources in South Central Los Angeles.
4. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island has a marine-based economy impacted by climate change.

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The Small Business Anti-Displacement Network (SBAN) is deeply grateful to the authors for contributing their experience and expertise to this collection. Your work provides valuable lessons for communities and small businesses that are confronting increasing climate impacts. By documenting and sharing your anti-displacement efforts, you offer a guide for other advocates working to combat climate displacement and help small businesses build resilience.

A special thanks to Strategic Actions for a Just Economy and Taller Comunidad La Goyco, who also hosted SBAN members and leaders for site visits in their communities. Your commitment to community-led climate solutions was inspiring. We were impressed by how you stand with and support residents and small business owners as they navigate ongoing climate events, climate gentrification, and an increasingly uncertain future.

Many people made this report possible. We especially thank Reemberto Rodriguez, who has built out and led SBAN's case study and site visit program, and Dejuan Johnson, our longtime case study liaison. We wish them both joy in their next chapters.

Editor Julie Wan made this publication happen, adapting to SBAN and author needs and supporting authors in developing and strengthening their case studies. Associate Director of Member Engagement & Programs Jamie Shanker-Passero was instrumental in managing the case study and site visit process, working closely with authors to provide feedback, encouragement, and resources along the way. Fayla Sutton, SBAN member liaison, provided invaluable editorial support at production time. Associate Director of Communications & Research Katy June-Friesen, PhD, led the final editorial production process, working with SBAN's longtime collaborator Kristen Argenio of Ideal Design Company. Our senior leadership team of Dr. Willow Lung, Dr. Gerrit-Jan Knaap, Bobby Boone, and Manuel Ochoa reviewed case studies and provided recommendations and insights to authors.

Finally, we thank our network of members and other SBAN family who contributed to our broader project to research and uplift climate resilience as a small business anti-displacement strategy. We are always learning from you. This work would also not be possible without the generous financial support of JPMorgan Chase and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Introduction

- **Willow Lung, PhD,** Director, SBAN
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Climate change is increasingly affecting small businesses. Climate disasters, ongoing impacts such as increasing heat and rising sea levels, climate adaptation projects, and mitigation policies can all disrupt and displace small businesses. Public and private climate-related investments can also significantly change neighborhoods, compounding or accelerating factors associated with gentrification that cause small business displacement, such as rising rents.

Small businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and immigrants in under-resourced neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable to both climate disasters and climate-related gentrification. Without effective climate resilience and recovery policies and support systems, small businesses often struggle to remain rooted in their communities.

SBAN members visit the Santurce neighborhood of San Juan, Puerto Rico, where the community resilience hub Taller Comunidad La Goyco is located. *Photo: Erika P. Rodriguez*



The case studies in this volume examine diverse strategies for preventing small business climate displacement caused by acute or ongoing climate events, as well as recovery, adaptation, and mitigation efforts. They offer models for how to prioritize small business needs in climate-vulnerable communities. The author organizations have worked with diverse communities at different scales to prevent displacement during and after climate-related events: the American Sustainable Business Institute, a research and education nonprofit that works with Tribal Nations across the United States; Taller Comunidad La Goyco, a community-based organization in the Santurce neighborhood of San Juan, Puerto Rico; Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, an economic justice organization in South Central, Los Angeles; and the Jorge M. Perez Metropolitan Center at Florida International University, an applied research institute that works throughout South Florida, including in Miami's Little Haiti community.

HOW CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT HAPPENS

Climate change compounds the economic and geographical challenges that many Black, Brown, and immigrant communities already face. These communities often lack the infrastructure to withstand major climate events. Moreover, small businesses in vulnerable neighborhoods often experience prolonged recovery after climate disasters due to post-disaster speculation, redevelopment, a lack of access to capital and other resources, and inadequate disaster assistance or disaster insurance. Some do not recover at all.

> "Climate change compounds the economic and geographical challenges that many Black, Brown, and immigrant communities already face."

Floods, hurricanes, heat waves, droughts, wildfires, and other disasters can immediately disrupt or displace small businesses because of building damage, impacts on employees, damage to neighborhood infrastructure, or interruption of systems on which businesses rely. If small businesses reopen after a disaster, they may continue to struggle. For some, their regular clientele is displaced, reducing their customer base.

Climate disasters and recovery investments can also accelerate gentrification and contribute to displacement. Developers and landlords may take advantage of low prices on damaged property to purchase, sell, and renovate commercial space with the goal of attracting new tenants that can pay higher rents. This can drive up rents for longtime small businesses and prevent new businesses from being able to find operating space. Landlords may also choose not to rebuild and instead sell properties that were once home to community-serving small businesses. Additionally, new neighborhood infrastructure investments intended to improve resilience in future disasters, such as sea walls or expanded green space and tree canopies, may attract higher-income residents and private development.

Climate change can also cause small business displacement outside major disasters. Gradual changes in temperature, precipitation, and seasonal weather patterns can steadily increase the costs and challenges of operating a business. Longer, hotter summers, for example, may reduce foot traffic for storefront businesses while increasing air conditioning expenses. Prolonged droughts can raise water costs, and changing growing conditions affect businesses that depend on agriculture. Businesses in areas experiencing repeated wildfires, flooding, or other climate-related risks may face rising insurance premiums or lose coverage altogether.

Gradual climate changes also impact the communities that small businesses serve. Some communities may lose population as climate risks increase, while others experience rapid growth. In coastal areas, for example, sea-level rise may cause residents to migrate inland, making some low-wealth neighborhoods newly desirable. As property values rise, longtime businesses may face higher rents and increased competition for commercial space. They may also lose longtime clientele who can no longer afford to live in the neighborhood.



SBAN members visit South Central Los Angeles, where Strategic Actions for a Just Economy is organizing small business tenants to prevent climate displacement. *Photo: Allison Shelley*

Finally, climate adaptation and mitigation efforts can lead to small business displacement. For example, when municipalities invest in renewable energy infrastructure or change zoning or other land use regulations, low-wealth neighborhoods may become desirable to new residents, businesses, and investors. Property values and rents may rise, pricing out longtime residents and small businesses. Cities may also adopt municipal codes that require businesses and property owners to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or retrofit properties to be more resilient to climate impacts, such as by installing flood- or fire-resistant materials or cooling systems. While these upgrades increase resilience, they may be unaffordable for some small business owners.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

SBAN's research and programming on climate displacement responds to the needs of our member organizations, whose small businesses advocacy work is increasingly intersecting with climate change. We have been working to identify and share approaches that keep businesses in place in neighborhoods vulnerable to climate displacement. We continue to add climate resilience tools to our *Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit*, including

commercial façade improvement programs, commercial rent regulations, disaster assistance programs, disaster preparedness plans, relocation assistance and right-to-return policies, land banking, and retrofitting programs. Our toolkit details how these tools can be implemented and by whom, as well as where they are being effectively deployed to preserve small businesses.

In 2025, we issued a call for case studies of strategies and tools that keep vulnerable small businesses thriving in their communities and offer lessons for combating commercial gentrification and displacement due to climate mitigation investments, climate migration, long-term climate impacts, or climate disasters. Over the last year, the four grantees in this volume have researched and produced their case studies while learning from each other.

Taller Comunidad La Goyco and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) also hosted SBAN members for site visits to learn more about their anti-displacement efforts. Attendees got a first-hand look at how communities in Puerto Rico and Los Angeles are combating climate gentrification and supporting impacted small businesses. We visited neighborhoods that are home to diverse groups, heard from small business owners and other community stakeholders, saw how climate-related anti-displacement tools were being implemented, and learned how coordinated community efforts and equitable planning strategies are being used to preserve local heritage and culture, build economic strength, and support small business sustainability.

We are releasing these case studies at our 2026 SBAN Summit on Preventing Climate Displacement, a two-day online convening focused on equitable climate resilience and recovery strategies that keep small businesses in place. The summit features case study authors along with more than 40 speakers from communities that are experiencing climate disasters and ongoing impacts from heat, fires, flooding, rising sea levels, and more.

At the time of this publication, we have also recently convened an SBAN Working Group on climate resilience and disaster recovery, co-facilitated with the Resilient Cities Network, that includes 13 SBAN member organizations from across the United States and Canada. Group members are collaborating to develop new or strengthen existing programs that help prevent climate-related small business displacement in the communities they serve.

Through our research, conversations, and convenings, we have learned that cities, organizations, and advocates are creating and deploying inventive strategies and tools to increase small business resiliency in the face of climate change. But the work is limited, and often piecemeal and underfunded. More needs to be done to share stories about what communities have tried and what has worked (or failed) to prevent small business closures before, during, and after climate-related events.

> “We need more education and policy advocacy about small business climate displacement at local, state, and federal levels. We also need to center BIPOC- and immigrant-owned small businesses in this advocacy.”

Equally important, more needs to be done to encourage communities to adopt and scale efforts that are working. We need more education and policy advocacy about small business climate displacement at local, state, and federal levels. We also need to center BIPOC- and immigrant-owned small businesses in this advocacy and increase funding for programs that address the needs of small businesses most vulnerable to climate displacement.

SBAN plans to further synthesize lessons from these case studies, our research, the summit, and the working group in a forthcoming strategy guide for building climate resilience programs that help keep small businesses thriving in place. We always welcome suggestions for tools and strategies we should be lifting up.

ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

The case studies document different kinds of anti-displacement strategies. Some highlight proactive approaches that have been instrumental in providing direct assistance to small businesses and residents during disasters and helped them reestablish their foothold after disasters. These organizations have stood up climate resilience hubs, mutual aid efforts, small business grant programs, resource hubs, and affordable commercial space programs that have allowed small businesses to remain or rebuild.

Other organizations in climate-vulnerable communities have strengthened the environment in which small businesses operate as redevelopment and increasing speculation take hold. Through advocacy and educational campaigns, they have established new policies and programs related to commercial tenant rights, community benefits, and community ownership that are helping to strengthen their local small business ecosystem.

The American Sustainable Business Network explores how Tribal Nations, Indigenous-led organizations, and Indigenous enterprises are responding to climate change and the pressures of small business displacement.

> “The case studies document climate resilience hubs, mutual aid efforts, small business grant programs, resource hubs, and affordable commercial space programs that have allowed small businesses to remain or rebuild.”

Using a cross-regional comparative framework and interviews with Tribal leaders, Indigenous practitioners, entrepreneurs and community members, their case study emphasizes the culturally specific ways that Indigenous communities conceptualize climate adaptation strategies. It demonstrates how locally rooted economic systems generate ownership, employment, revenue, technical capacity, and long-term institutional continuity that function as climate resilience and anti-displacement infrastructure. The study offers lessons for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and institutions in combatting climate-related small business displacement. This includes insights into sovereignty and local decision-making, capacity building, community-controlled assets, and long-term reinvestment strategies.

Researchers at the Jorge M. Perez Metropolitan Center at Florida International University explore the impacts of a community benefits agreement (CBA) established for Miami’s Little Haiti neighborhood following planning and zoning regulations that positioned the city as a technological and innovation hub.

As a haven for Haitian immigrants since the 1970s, Little Haiti has been impacted by multiple waves of gentrification. In the past couple years, the community has experienced substantial real estate investment, increases in property values, and a rise in non-resident ownership. Many associate these trends with the neighborhood’s location on high ground, which mitigates flooding and other climate-related risks faced by more wealthy Miami communities. The new regulations threaten to exacerbate the existing forces of gentrification in the neighborhood, including those associated with its designation as an innovation district, and displace both residents and small businesses.

The study examines the competing visions, contestations, and challenges surrounding the CBA negotiations, emphasizing the importance of community voice, local control, and inclusive planning. Based on surveys of small businesses that received grants through the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust, the administrators of the CBA, it also examines the effectiveness of the CBA in stemming small business displacement and the challenges that businesses have faced as redevelopment has taken hold.

In Santurce, Puerto Rico, researchers working in partnership with Taller Comunidad La Goyco examine how the organization developed and implemented

anti-displacement strategies in response to climate-related displacement pressures, including those caused by Hurricane Maria.

In 2015, neighborhood residents reclaimed a former public school in the heart of the community, transforming it into a cultural and resilience center. Today, La Goyco hosts cultural events and programs, supports local entrepreneurs with affordable workspace, and acts as a community gathering space during climate events. Since 2017, when Maria devastated the island and left residents and small businesses struggling with widespread infrastructure failures, La Goyco has helped residents and businesses combat multiple gentrification pressures. They have organized against speculative reinvestment that caters to tourists at the expense of local residents and small businesses, including the proliferation of bars, restaurants, and short-term rentals.

Drawing on interviews with a community stakeholders, the case study highlights La Goyco as a community-led model of cultural and small business resilience that integrates physical infrastructure, economic inclusion, cultural programming, policy advocacy, and community control.

In South Central Los Angeles, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) investigates the impact of climate-related infrastructure investments on small businesses. As municipalities across the state of California have invested in climate resilience policies and plans, SAJE documents how these investments have impacted over 200 small businesses in South Central. Their case study shows that areas targeted for climate investments have experienced increased commercial rents, landlord harassment, and evictions.

SAJE's Displacement Avoidance Project (DAP), which began with support from the South LA Eco-Lab, is an initiative to improve environmental conditions and promote equitable development by investing in community-led climate solutions in underserved neighborhoods. Through DAP, community organizers have engaged small business owners to discuss their experiences with new climate investments and commercial landlords. They have also supported small businesses in initiatives to raise awareness about commercial tenant protections and advance collective action, including launching a commercial tenant rights campaign in the City of Los Angeles. Their case study argues that to avoid small business displacement, climate investments must be paired with strong commercial tenant protections.

Collectively, the varied approaches in these case studies build community capacity and resources to support the small businesses most at risk of climate displacement. We hope these studies will be useful for other communities working to do the same.

Chapter 1

Using a Community Benefits Agreement to Reduce Climate Displacement of Small Businesses in Miami's Little Haiti

- **Ned Murray, PhD,** Associate Director
- **David Ortiz,** Research Specialist & PhD Candidate

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We would like to express our gratitude to the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust (LHRT) who served as our partner in the case study, and specifically, President/CEO Joann Milord and staff, along with the Little Haiti business owners and recipients of the small business grants through the community benefits agreement (CBA) who participated in this study, as well as the LHRT staff who helped administer the surveys.

We would also like to share our respect and admiration for the Little Haiti business owners who, over years and decades of tireless effort, have helped create the economically and culturally vibrant community that characterizes Little Haiti. We also honor the businesses that have vanished over the years due to gentrification or economic hardship, but whose legacies remain through their lasting impacts on their community members. Despite the controversies surrounding the Little Haiti CBA, we thank the Magic City Innovation District and their project partners for their $31 million contribution toward mitigating the development's negative externalities, as well as for the commitments they have made to cultural preservation.

Executive Summary

Situated between 7 and 14 feet above sea level, Miami's Little Haiti community has been affected by both climate gentrification and conventional forms of gentrification, with the latter being driven by heightened market-rate real estate investment (Grove et. al., 2020). Compared to Miami's low-lying areas that are more susceptible to flooding and sea-level rise, Little Haiti's topographical advantage was one of the deliberate planning considerations in the siting of the Little Haiti–Magic City Innovation District and in its $1.4 billion Special Area Plan development proposal. As part of the development, a

$31 million community benefits agreement (CBA) was established to be administered by the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust. The Little Haiti Case Study provides critical insights into the competing visions, contestations, and challenges surrounding CBA negotiation processes. The following list highlights key takeaways applicable to communities seeking to mitigate the negative externalities surrounding large-scale developments through comprehensive CBAs:

- A unified community voice is critical to strengthening the bargaining capacity of local communities during CBA negotiation processes.
- The absence of a cohesive community voice benefits developers at the expense of more comprehensive CBA terms.
- A highly accommodative strategy may result in tokenism at the expense of greater local control over resources and deeper community involvement.
- A highly anti-development approach may result in exclusion from official community affairs and CBA negotiations altogether.

In addition, through surveys conducted with small businesses in Little Haiti that received grants through the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust, this study empirically examines the challenges these businesses currently face, their anticipated future needs, and the extent to which the CBA has functioned as an effective gentrification mitigation and small business anti-displacement strategy in offsetting the impacts associated with the Magic City Innovation District development.

Figure 1.1: A mural in Little Haiti by Serge Toussaint, a Haitian-born muralist and artist and longtime resident of the neighborhood.



Introduction

On June 27, 2019, Miami city commissioners approved the Magic City Innovation District Special Area Plan, a $1.4 billion development proposal located in the heart of the Little Haiti neighborhood. This Special Area Plan comprises approximately 18 acres in the neighborhood and includes residential towers, hotels, office and retail space, and innovation-oriented commercial uses intended to position Miami as a leading technology and innovation hub. As part of the development, a $31 million community benefits agreement was established to be administered by the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust. While some local officials viewed the agreement as a major victory and an unprecedented investment in the community, many local activists saw the project as another wave of climate gentrification and real-estate speculation that would intensify displacement and affordability pressures for Little Haiti residents and would drive out local small businesses.

Situated between 7 and 14 feet above sea level, Little Haiti's topography provides a natural defense against climate change-related flooding and environmental risks. In contrast, affluent coastal communities such as Miami Beach stand only 3 to 4 feet above sea level and therefore require significant infrastructure investments and public funding to mitigate such risks. As a result, Little Haiti has experienced climate gentrification through substantial real-estate investment, exponential increases in property values, and a notable rise in LLC property ownership. As Zelalem Adefris, CEO of Catalyst Miami, noted in an interview:

> *We have heard from community members living in Little Haiti and Liberty City that they get knocks on their door and offers to sell their home, and that those offers will often be cash offers that also come with a period of time where they can have free rent in South Dade, so Homestead, for example. [There is] this pressure to sell your home and then also move to this lower elevation area that's more susceptible to sea level rise. (WPBT, 2019)*

However, as we argue throughout this case study, climate gentrification is not a phenomenon separate from broader, long-standing patterns of urban gentrification that disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. Rather, climate-related investment pressures intensify and accelerate pre-existing dynamics of financial speculation, displacement, and unequal redevelopment. In this sense, climate change does not create entirely new urban inequalities but instead amplifies existing socioeconomic and racial disparities already embedded within housing and real estate markets.

> "Climate change does not create entirely new urban inequalities but instead amplifies existing socioeconomic and racial disparities."

Although community benefits agreements are often controversial and criticized for their limited enforceability or scope, they nonetheless serve as an important mitigation strategy intended to reduce the social and economic impacts associated with large-scale development projects. Through surveys conducted with small businesses in Little Haiti that received grants through the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust, this case study examines the challenges these businesses currently face, their anticipated future needs, and the extent to which the community benefits agreement has functioned as an effective gentrification mitigation and small business anti-displacement strategy in offsetting the impacts associated with the proposed Magic City Innovation District project.

Case Study Approach

The Little Haiti Case Study examines how the community benefits agreement (CBA), established through the Magic City Innovation District development, has assisted small businesses in mitigating the negative externalities surrounding the gentrifying potential of such a mass-scale project, as well as

heightened real-estate investment pressures driven by climate gentrification. The CBA, administered through the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust (LHRT), provides grants of up to $20,000 for commercial improvement, or $10,000 for innovation (equipment, operations, technology, etc.) improvements. To date, 20 Little Haiti businesses have received grants under the program, and a total of $160,000 has been disbursed. The initial steps in the strategy implementation included the formation of the partnership between the LHRT and FIU's Jorge Perez Metropolitan Center; identification of key stakeholders; and the completion of the planning and analytical groundwork.

To better understand the business profile and economic activity within Little Haiti, an economic geography analysis was first conducted using Florida Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) 2025 data, which includes address, employment, and payroll information at the individual business establishment level. Businesses were geocoded and geoprocessed by intersecting the economic data with a digitized neighborhood layer representing Little Haiti's official boundaries, allowing for a comprehensive spatial analysis of business activity within the neighborhood.

This case study also incorporates well-established quantitative and qualitative methodological frameworks to analyze the extent and magnitude of gentrification that has been occurring in Little Haiti (Freeman, 2005; Smith et al., 2024). This was conducted by analyzing Little Haiti's trends in key socio-demographic gentrification indicators using ACS data from 2018 to 2024. This approach was triangulated using qualitative data, including field observations as well as relevant documents, business records, and literature.

> "The Little Haiti Revitalization Trust aims to preserve the cultural identity of Little Haiti while encouraging residents, former residents, and new stakeholders to invest in the area's future."

Following the completion of the planning and analytical framework, the alliance proceeded in surveying businesses that have received grants through the LHRT for the purpose of initiating dialogue and determining their business financial needs, operational challenges, and general well-being. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) was developed by the FIU Jorge Perez Metropolitan Center (JPMC) with the input of the LHRT. The survey was administered by the LHRT using their listing of Little Haiti businesses that received funding through the LHRT's Small Business Grant. The surveys were completed between January and March 2026 and were administered in both English and Creole. The survey data will help identify existing and future business needs, as well as additional measures necessary to support long-term business viability and maintain a stable commercial and cultural environment capable of withstanding ongoing displacement pressures associated with climate gentrification and speculative real estate investment.

Leading Organizations

THE LITTLE HAITI REVITALIZATION TRUST (LHRT)

The Little Haiti Revitalization Trust was established in 2016 to manage the community benefits agreement (CBA) tied to the Magic City Innovation District, a $31 million, 30-year funding commitment aimed at mitigating gentrification and supporting local residents through affordable housing, small business grants up to $20,000, and scholarships. The LHRT supports economic development, job creation, and homebuyer assistance within the city of Miami's Little Haiti boundaries. The LHRT, serving as the community's financial hub, has the mission and capacity to manage the fund. The LHRT, led by its President/CEO Joann Milord, is responsible for promoting economic development, business, and commerce in the community.

The LHRT works in partnership with the City of Miami to lead community-driven redevelopment efforts in Little Haiti. The LHRT's mission is to promote economic growth, create jobs, support local

businesses, and expand access to affordable housing. Through strategic planning, homebuyer assistance, and marketing initiatives, the Trust aims to preserve the cultural identity of Little Haiti while encouraging residents, former residents, and new stakeholders to invest in the area's future.

JORGE M. PÉREZ METROPOLITAN CENTER AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The Jorge M. Pérez Metropolitan Center (JPMC) at Florida International University (FIU) is a leading urban "think tank" in South Florida, established in 1997 as an applied research unit in the Green School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). With a mission to provide policy solutions to public, private, and nonprofit organizations in South Florida, the Center has a solid record of providing technical services to South Florida communities in economic development, housing, transportation, and land use planning. The Center's approach to delivering professional services is to consider the unique needs of individual communities while adhering to recognized methodologies for data analysis and reporting.

> "Since the early 20th century, South Florida has been a prime site for real estate speculation."

The JPMC's unique expertise lies in formulating comprehensive solutions to complex public policy issues. Its senior leadership has decades of experience in data analytics, economic development, housing affordability, community development, transportation, survey research and community engagement. The JPMC is regarded as a "go-to" source for timely data and insight surrounding housing affordability thanks to its ability to develop original methodologies and show communities new ways to examine their housing markets, workforce, and policy perspectives. The JPMC's multi-disciplinary team of experts has the capacity to deliver high-quality plans with strong community support, with an established record of successful implementation. The JPMC team is led by Associate Director Dr. Ned Murray of the American Institute of Certified Planners AICP and Research Associate and geography PhD candidate David Ortiz.

Neighborhood Context

Since the early 20th century, South Florida has been a prime site for real estate speculation. The first wave was characterized by the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s, with major investment in tourism and housing marketed toward affluent Northerners seeking to escape harsh winters. The second wave resulted from international capital flows that began in the early 1970s, especially from the Global South, when political turmoil positioned Miami to be a relatively safe regulatory environment amid unstable and depreciating currencies abroad. In addition, demographic shifts fueled by immigration and geopolitical factors have significantly shaped South Florida's landscape.

Beginning in the late 19th century, Bahamians migrated to South Florida and helped build much of Miami, dredging what would otherwise have been swamp land. In 1959, the Cuban Revolution fueled an exodus of migrants escaping a communist regime; they arrived in Miami in multiple waves. By the latter part of the 20th century, many immigrants came from other parts of Latin America. These forces have converged to create social dynamics not observable elsewhere in the country. It has also led to the successful establishment of multiple ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods, including Little Havana, Little Santo Domingo (Allapattah), Little Bahamas in Coconut Grove, and Little Haiti.

Little Haiti emerged from the mass emigration of Haitians escaping their country's U.S-backed Duvalier dictatorships from the 1950s to 1980s, and settling in the deteriorated north of Miami's downtown area. Decades of impoverishment ensued, juxtaposed with eventual federal civil-rights legislation that lured upwardly mobile Haitians to the suburbs while increasingly leaving the working poor behind.

Little Haiti, formerly known as Lemon City, was settled by Haitian immigrants between 1977 and



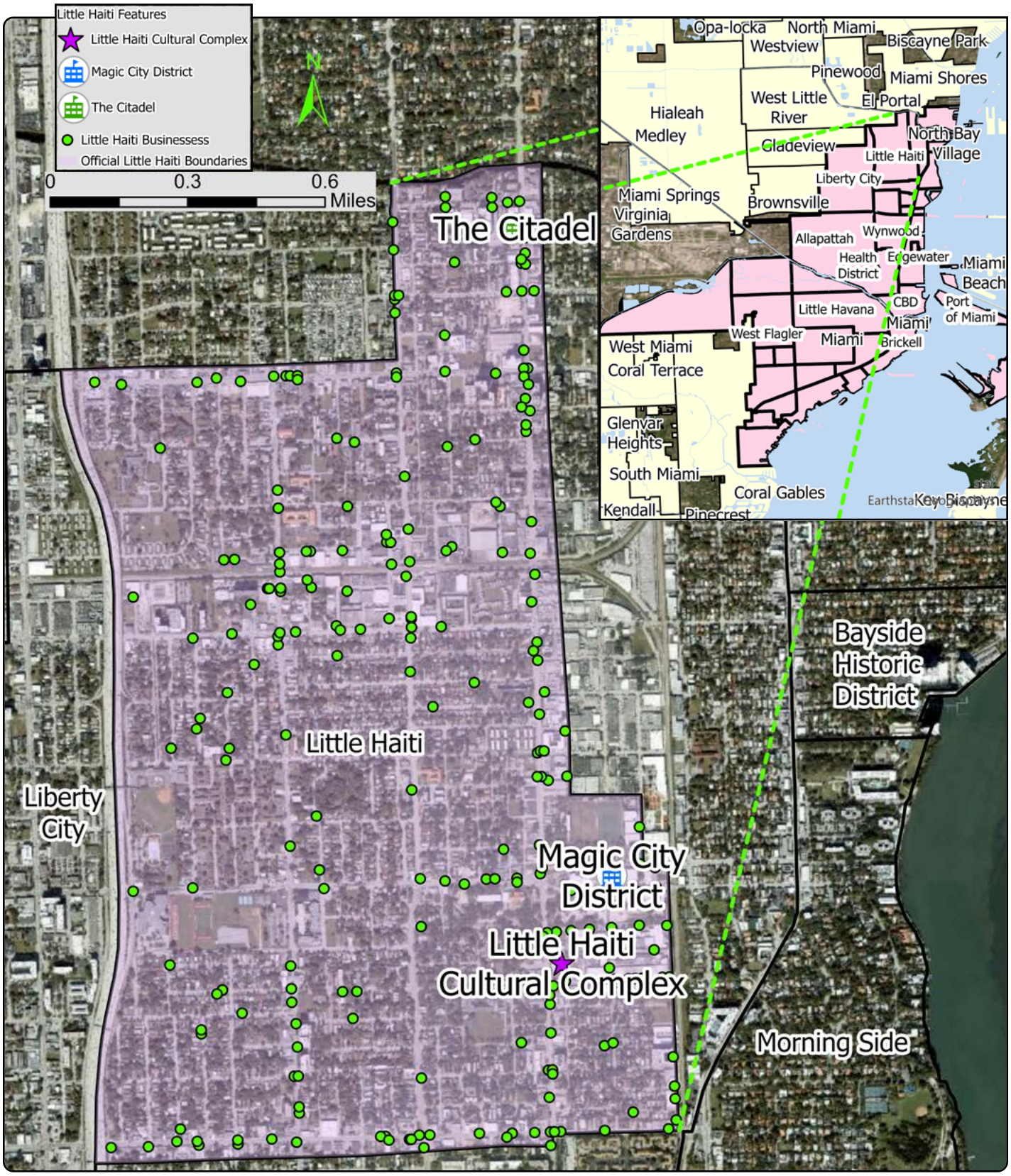
Figure 1.2: Little Haiti Cultural Complex and Caribbean Marketplace, the hub of Little Haiti's arts and cultural community in Miami.

1981, following Haiti's political unrest and upheaval during the regimes of François "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. Approximately 60,000 Haitians landed in Miami during this period, and more than 200,000 Haitian immigrants followed as the diaspora spread throughout Miami-Dade County.

By the 2000s, the Haitian community's churches, social service organizations, and political leadership—many of whom lived elsewhere in the metropolitan area—launched a campaign that in 2016 secured the district's official designation as "Little Haiti." While the Little Haiti community has been in existence since the 1970s, it wasn't until 2016 that the Miami City Commission approved a resolution to finally put Little Haiti on the map with official neighborhood boundaries (Figure 1.3). The resolution also recognized Haitian contributions to the city and was viewed by Haitian community leaders as helpful in battling gentrification.

Despite many obstacles, including structural barriers in the form of unequal treatment as an immigrant group (Portes & Armony, 2018; Stepick et. al. 2003), many Haitians have managed to prosper and fuel economic growth in Little Haiti by establishing successful businesses and fostering strong community ties. Nonetheless, gentrification significantly challenges the decades of effort that local business leaders have invested in the community, which has already experienced changes evident in in its cultural and business characteristics.

Figure 1.3: Official Little Haiti Neighborhood Boundaries and Employer Business Distribution. *Source: Data from Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (2025). Map digitized and produced by authors.*



In addition, the Supreme Court's June 25th, 2026, decision to side with the Trump administration in terminating Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for people of Haitian and Syrian origin will undoubtedly place significant political and socio-economic pressures on the Haitian diaspora, including Little Haiti.

EMPLOYER BUSINESS ACTIVITY IN LITTLE HAITI

The FIU Jorge M. Pérez Metropolitan Center (FIU JPMC) has access to restricted-use data, such as the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), at the individual business establishment level for 2025. This access allows us to portray and analyze employer business activity in Little Haiti using a highly granular and up-to-date approach.

Using this data, we calculated the number of employer establishments, total employment, average establishment size, total and average payroll, and average wages for each industry. Because the QCEW data provides addresses and x–y coordinates of establishments, businesses were geocoded and geoprocessed by intersecting this economic data with a digitized neighborhood layer of Little Haiti's official boundaries, allowing for the mapping of the spatial distribution of employer businesses in Little Haiti (Figure 1.3).

As Table 1.1 shows, there were a total of 334 employer business establishments in Little Haiti, with total employment of 2,811. Medium-sized businesses with 11 to 99 employees accounted for the largest share of employment (55.8%), followed by small businesses with 10 or fewer employees (28.6%). However, while medium-sized businesses employed the most workers, small businesses made up the majority of establishments (82.6%). As shown in Table 1.2, restaurants had both the highest number of establishments and employment (467) in Little Haiti. Not only did restaurants have the highest levels of employment and number of establishments, but they also generated the highest total payroll ($23 million) in 2025. Overall, this analysis underscores the importance of small businesses to Little Haiti's economic resilience. While medium-sized businesses drive employment, the predominance of small establishments highlights the importance and need to sustain local businesses and to provide a supportive and cohesive environment for these small businesses to thrive.

CURRENT CONTEXT OF GENTRIFICATION IN LITTLE HAITI

Little Haiti has undergone significant gentrification and displacement over the past 10 years. A 2015 study prepared by the JPMC on behalf of the Haitian American Community Development Corporation (HACDC) found significant economic and demographic changes within the peripheral census block groups that make up the boundaries of Little Haiti. The 2018 *City of Miami Affordable Housing Master Plan* found gentrification had accelerated throughout the neighborhood threatening the socioeconomics and cultural fabric of Little Haiti. Since then, Little Haiti has seen a burst of new development and interest from real estate developers, including the Magic City Innovation District, an 18-acre complex of middle- to upper-middle-income residential towers.

Table 1.1: Employer Business Characteristics in Little Haiti.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES	% OF BUSINESSES	TOTAL EMPLOYEES	% OF EMPLOYEES	TOTAL PAYROLL
≤10	276	82.6%	803	28.6%	$54,636,944
11 to 99	55	16.5%	1,569	55.8%	$106,190,168
100 or more	3	0.9%	439	15.6%	$23,906,600
Total	**334**	**100.0%**	**2,811**	**100.0%**	**$184,733,712**

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (2025)

4_NAICs	DESCRIPTION	ESTABLISH-MENTS	EMPLOY-MENT	AVG. EMPLOYEES	TOTAL PAYROLL 2025	AVG. PAYROLL
7225	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	25	467	18.7	$23,957,064	$51,300
3115	Dairy Product Manufacturing	2	176	88.0	$9,661,656	$54,896
6211	Offices of Physicians	11	154	14.0	$9,195,448	$59,711
6232	Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	3	128	42.7	$5,933,864	$46,358
5511	Management of Companies and Enterprises	3	109	36.3	$14,712,852	$134,980

Table 1.2: Top 5 Industries in Little Haiti by Employment. *Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (2025)*

Gentrification commonly refers to the reinvestment of inner-city properties and the resulting negative consequences, including the displacement of local communities and residents being priced out due to increases in rents, taxes, property values, or services. As the socio-economic composition of local residents begins to change, so do the characteristics of businesses: Increases in rents drive out local businesses, which are then replaced by new establishments that cater to the demands of the influx of new residents.

Conventional approaches to measuring gentrification utilize publicly available data, such as American Community Survey (ACS) data, to track neighborhood socio-economic change over two points in time. It is commonly agreed that certain criteria must be met for a neighborhood to be considered gentrifying. First, the neighborhood must be gentrifiable. This is typically determined by whether, at the beginning of the time period, the neighborhood's median household income was below a given benchmark, usually that of its city, county, or metropolitan area (Ding et al., 2016; Freeman, 2005). After meeting these criteria, indicators such as median household income, educational attainment, median house values, and median rents are used to assess whether the neighborhood is gentrifying (Freeman, 2005; Zuk et al., 2018).

A simple (yet effective) way to detect gentrification is to assess whether a neighborhood's indicator growth rates are equal to or greater than those of its benchmark (Ding et al., 2016). Median household income is used both to determine whether a neighborhood is gentrifiable and whether it is gentrifying. However, changes in educational attainment may be more indicative than income in identifying early stages of gentrification. This is because income does not always capture early waves driven by influxes of young professionals, students, artists, or recent graduates, who may earn less but are considered of higher socio-economic status (Freeman, 2005; Johnson et al., 2021). Median house values and rents are used to detect significant reinvestment, a key driver of gentrification. It is important to note that different indicators may yield different insights; for example, a neighborhood may signal gentrification in terms of education but not income, and vice versa.

Little Haiti meets the gentrifiable criteria outlined by Freeman (2005), as it is located within the central city and has historically experienced significant

disinvestment (Cox, 2025). In addition, Table 1.3 shows that in 2018 all the census block groups within Little Haiti for which ACS 5-year estimate data were available had median household incomes below that of Miami-Dade County. Census block groups were used instead of census tracts because they are the smallest available geographic unit, allowing for a closer fit to Little Haiti's boundaries without extending into more affluent adjacent areas. The year 2018 was selected as the starting point because it coincides with the approval of the Magic City Innovation District development, while 2024 is the most recent year for which ACS data are available.

As Appendix B shows, 6 out of the 12 block groups with available income data had median household income growth rates higher than that of the county. Additionally, 8 out of the 14 block groups had educational attainment growth rates exceeding the county benchmark. Both indicators suggest that the socio-economic status and composition of Little Haiti are rapidly changing.

Regarding investment, as measured by growth in median house values and rents, Little Haiti has experienced substantial increases (see Appendix B). While median house values in Miami-Dade County rose by 75% between 2018 and 2024, 5 out of the 6 block groups in Little Haiti with available data saw increases exceeding 100%, and 3 block groups experienced increases of over 200%. Similarly, 10 out of the 14 block groups recorded median rent increases above the county growth rate during the same period. Although taxable values are not directly derived from ACS house values, this underscores the importance of Florida's Save Our Homes (SOH) provision, which limits annual increases in tax assessments for homesteaded properties. Without it, there

Table 1.3: Gentrification in Little Haiti at the Block Group Level

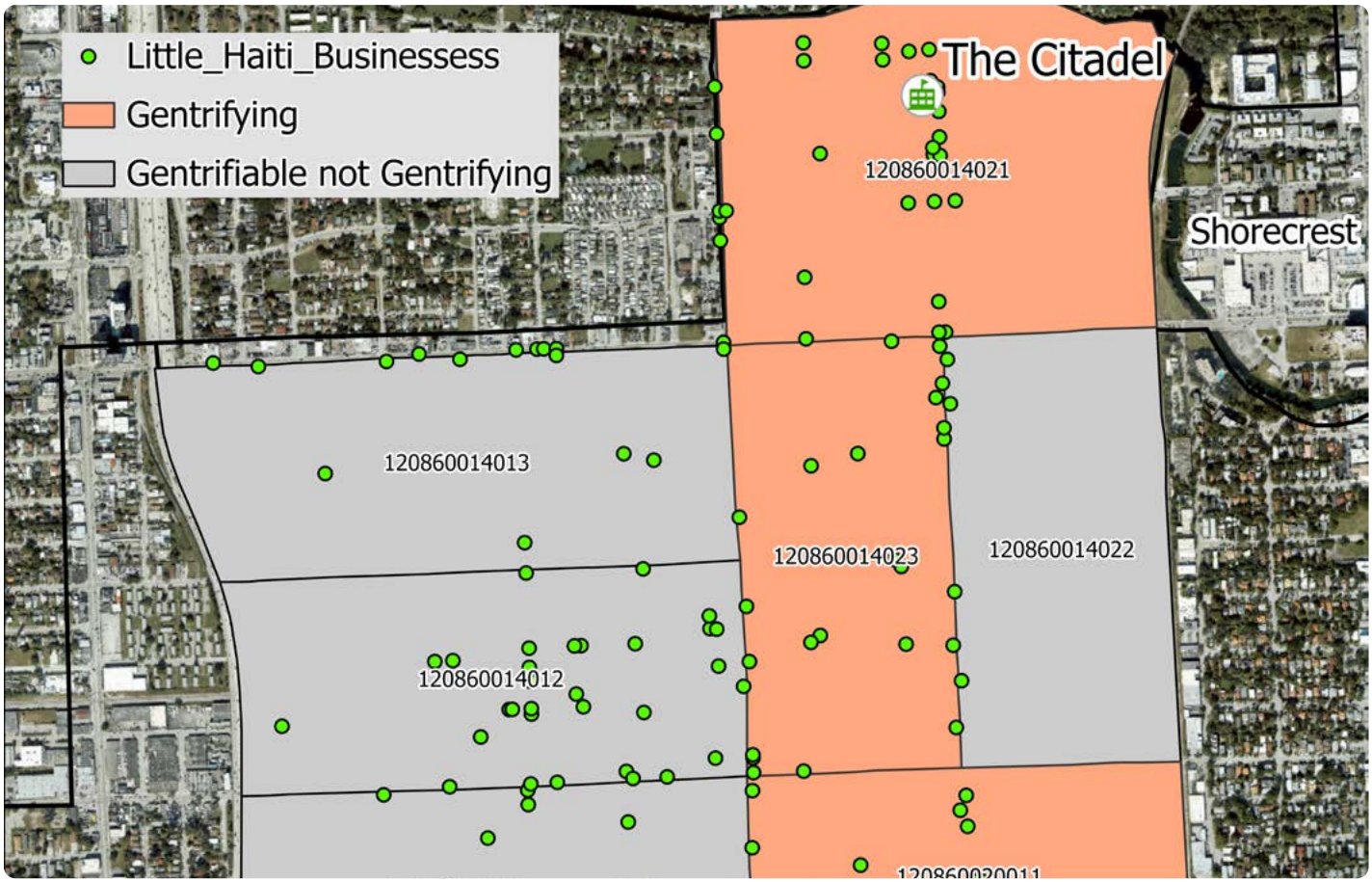
	MHI ≤ COUNTY (2018)	POPULATION 25 AND OLDER WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER	MEDIAN RENT	GENTRIFICATION BY CHANGE IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT *AND* RENT
Block Group ID	**Gentrifiable**	**Growth Rate ≥ County**	**Growth Rate ≥ County**	**Gentrifying**
120860014022	Yes		X	
120860014023	**Yes**	**X**	**X**	**Yes**
120860020032	Yes			
120860020041	Yes		X	
120860020042	**Yes**	**X**		
120860014011	Yes			
120860014012	Yes		X	
120860014013	Yes		X	
120860014021	**Yes**	**X**	**X**	**Yes**
120860020012		X		
120860020031	**Yes**	**X**	**X**	**Yes**
120860020011	**Yes**	**X**	**X**	**Yes**
120860020013		**X**	**X**	**Yes**
120860020014	Yes		X	

would be little protection for local residents, and sharp increases in property taxes—a negative consequence of gentrification—could lead to higher rates of foreclosure and displacement.

Because median house values are not available for multiple block groups within Little Haiti, we focus on median rent increases as a signifier of economic reinvestment and on educational attainment as an indicator of socio-demographic change. Together, this approach yields an accepted operationalization for measuring gentrification (Smith et al., 2024). As Table 1.3 shows, five block groups are significantly experiencing gentrification within Little Haiti. As illustrated in Figure 1.4, these gentrifying block groups are concentrated along the NE 2nd Avenue corridor, Little Haiti's main commercial strip, where there has been substantial redevelopment and investment activity in recent years, including The Citadel, a trendy indoor mall renovated in 2019 from a deteriorating commercial building.

However, one limitation of quantitative approaches to measuring gentrification is that macro-level data are not always indicative of what is actually happening on the ground (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2019). For this reason, qualitative data—including fieldwork, interviews, and visual methodologies—are indispensable for triangulating quantitative findings and ground-truthing results. One such approach is to detect visible renovation and reinvestment using Google Street View images (Hwang & Sampson, 2014). As previously mentioned, cultural displacement is one of the negative effects of gentrification. Ethnic businesses are a key component of the urban fabric of Little Haiti, including botanicas, religious goods

Figure 1.4: Gentrifying Block Groups in Little Haiti.



Source: Map compiled and geoprocessed by authors using ArcPro.

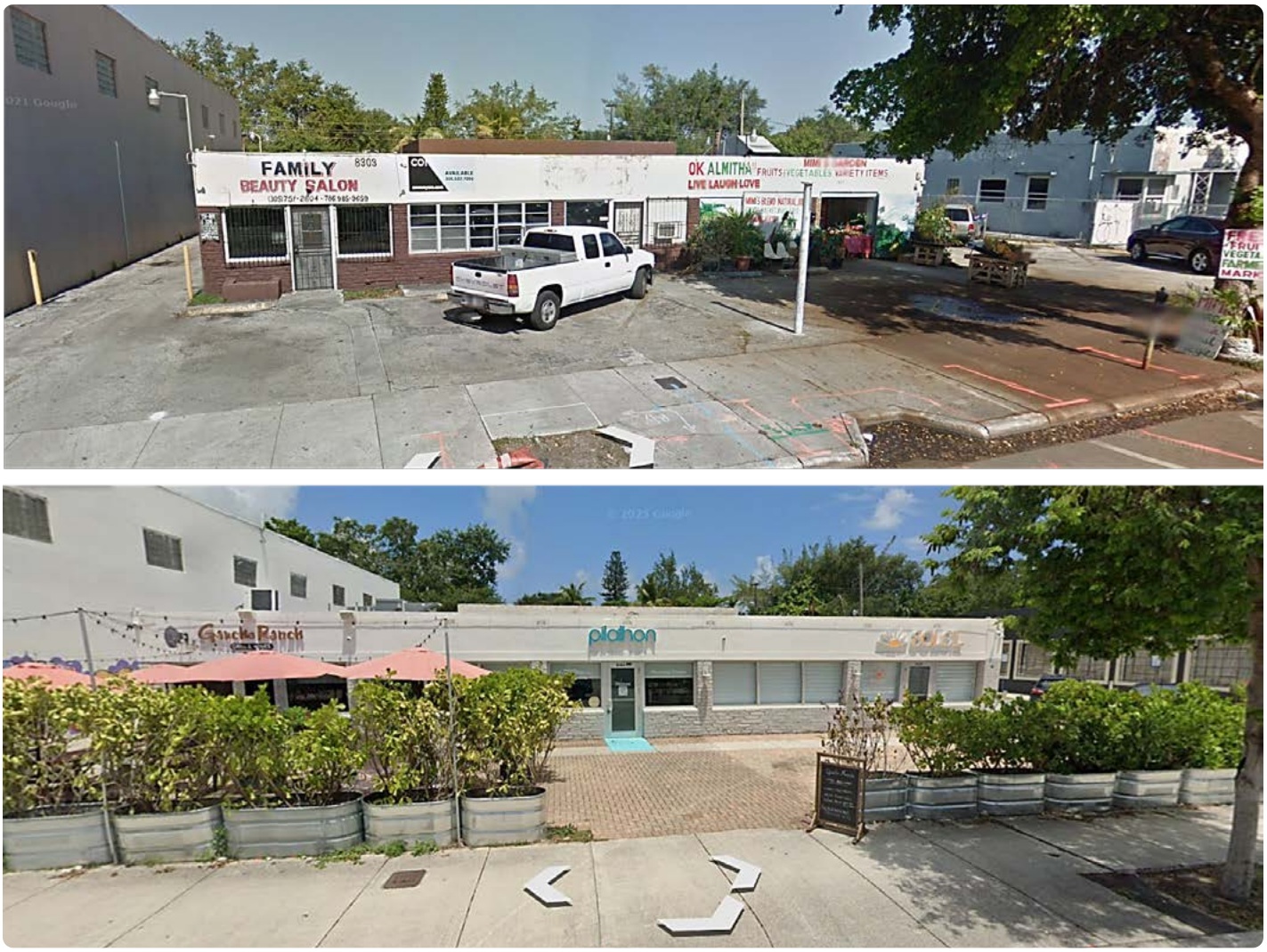


Figure 1.5: Gentrification Commercial Activity in Little Haiti, 2015 & 2024. *Source: Google Street View 2015 & 2024.*

stores, Caribbean grocery stores, and Haitian restaurants and bakeries. Through the process of gentrification, local businesses begin to be priced out due to increasing rents and are replaced by establishments that cater to more affluent newcomers. Typical examples of gentrifying businesses include coffee shops, vibrant nightlife-oriented restaurants, bars, and wellness studios (Glaeser et al., 2018).

This transition in business characteristics as a result of gentrification is clearly seen in Figure 1.5, which depicts a commercial building in 2015 containing a local beauty salon and a small fresh fruits and vegetables grocery store, both being remodeled in 2016 and replaced by a wellness center and a Pilates / yoga studio across the street from The Citadel by 2024. This commercial building is located on the northernmost block group in Little Haiti, which coincides with our quantitative analysis identifying it as a gentrifying block group. Down the street, in the same commercial corridor and block group, Figure 1.6 illustrates a similar pattern, where a local bakery and botanica retail store standing in 2017 businesses integral to Little Haiti's ethnic characteristics, are superseded in 2021 by a trendy coffee shop and retail boutique stores.

As shown in our quantitative analysis using key gentrification indicators, including income, rent, house values and educational attainment, Little Haiti has experienced significant changes in its



Figure 1.6: Gentrification Commercial Activity in Little Haiti, 2017 & 2021. *Source: Google Street View 2017 & 2021.*

socioeconomic and demographic composition. These findings are triangulated and confirmed by visual analysis, which depicts the level transformation occurring in Little Haiti's urban fabric, and which is likely to accelerate due to climate gentrification and speculative real estate investment in the neighborhood.

CLIMATE GENTRIFICATION IN LITTLE HAITI & THE MAGIC CITY SAP

In recent years, Greater Miami has become ground zero as a laboratory for climate gentrification and resilience debates due to the region's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, sea-level rise, and natural disasters (Taylor and Aalbers, 2022). In fact, the term *climate gentrification* originated from Keenan et al.'s (2018) empirical study examining the relationship between elevation and real estate price valuation in Miami-Dade County, making it one of the first studies that empirically demonstrated the forces of climate gentrification at play. As an active and evolving discourse, climate gentrification (CG) refers to the displacement of low-income minority communities driven by the climate risk management strategies of developers and financial institutions seeking to hedge from declining coastal property values and rising insurance costs associated with climate change.

CG can occur due to various factors, including public investment in green infrastructure or elevation profit differentials from insurance and risk pricing. The

latter is relevant to Little Haiti, a vibrant neighborhood north of the City of Miami's central business district whose higher elevation and relatively lower property values make it attractive for speculative climate investment practices and CG. This is because the majority of Miami-Dade County (56%) is 6 feet or less above sea level, according to county elevation data. Most of that land has been paved over and developed. The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact expects sea levels to rise 3 to 8 feet over the next century, putting these low-lying areas at risk.

Residents and experts assert that such risks have sparked interest in Little Haiti and other minority communities over the years—they are low-income areas built on some of the highest ground in Miami-Dade County, along the spine of an ancient limestone formation known as the Miami Rock Ridge. They are less vulnerable to the increasing threat of sea rise and the coastal hurricane storm surge flooding that plagues wealthy but low-lying Miami enclaves like Brickell.

> "Despite gentrification, the Little Haiti Cultural Complex and Caribbean Marketplace, the hub of Little Haiti's arts and cultural community, has continued to hold ground."

The Little Haiti–Magic City Innovation District SAP case provides a revealing example of how climate change and resilience discourses can shape competing visions of urban futures. In addition to economic growth, project developers framed the SAP proposal as a model of sustainable and climate-resilient urban development, emphasizing LEED-certified construction, resilient infrastructure, and energy-efficient design. Importantly, the developers also overtly reported the significance of Little Haiti's topography, presenting it as an advantage for the project in terms of resilience and protection from flooding and sea-level rise. In fact, the first page of the Special Area Concept Book submitted by Magic City on June 20th, 2018—excluding the cover page and table of contents—was an elevation map explicitly labeled "topography resilience" depicting the proposed Magic City Innovation District on Little Haiti's highly elevated land (Figure 1.7).

In addition, as stated in Section B on page 3 of the letter of intent prepared by the developer's consulting law firm and submitted to the City on August 8th, 2018, one of the primary factors driving the sustainability and resilience component of the development was what they deemed "topography resilience":

> *The Magic City SAP has been located and designed with a focus on sustainability and resiliency. For example, as shown on Exhibit C, the location on a high coastal ridge will help protect the Magic City SAP campus from flooding and potential future sea level rise issues. (Akkerman LLP, 2018, p.3)*

Exhibit C referenced another topographical map, this time at the county scale, once again depicting the proposed Magic City project on Little Haiti's high elevation land. Such language may confirm what many community members knew: that the project was another wave of speculative real estate development tied to climate gentrification.

This highlights how climate gentrification can exacerbate preexisting gentrification in minority communities where historically orchestrated racialized disinvestment, relatively low property values, proximity to a desirable urban core and amenities, and topographical safeguards against flooding and climate change make such properties highly desirable for reinvestment. Rapid gentrification has resulted in the displacement of Little Haiti's small businesses and a gradual diminishment of Little Haiti's cultural settlement and population.

Despite this, the Little Haiti Cultural Complex and Caribbean Marketplace, the hub of Little Haiti's arts and cultural community, has continued to hold ground. In addition, the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust, established as part of the community benefits agreement for the approved Magic City Innovation District, has focused on preserving and supporting the growth of Little Haiti's small businesses both

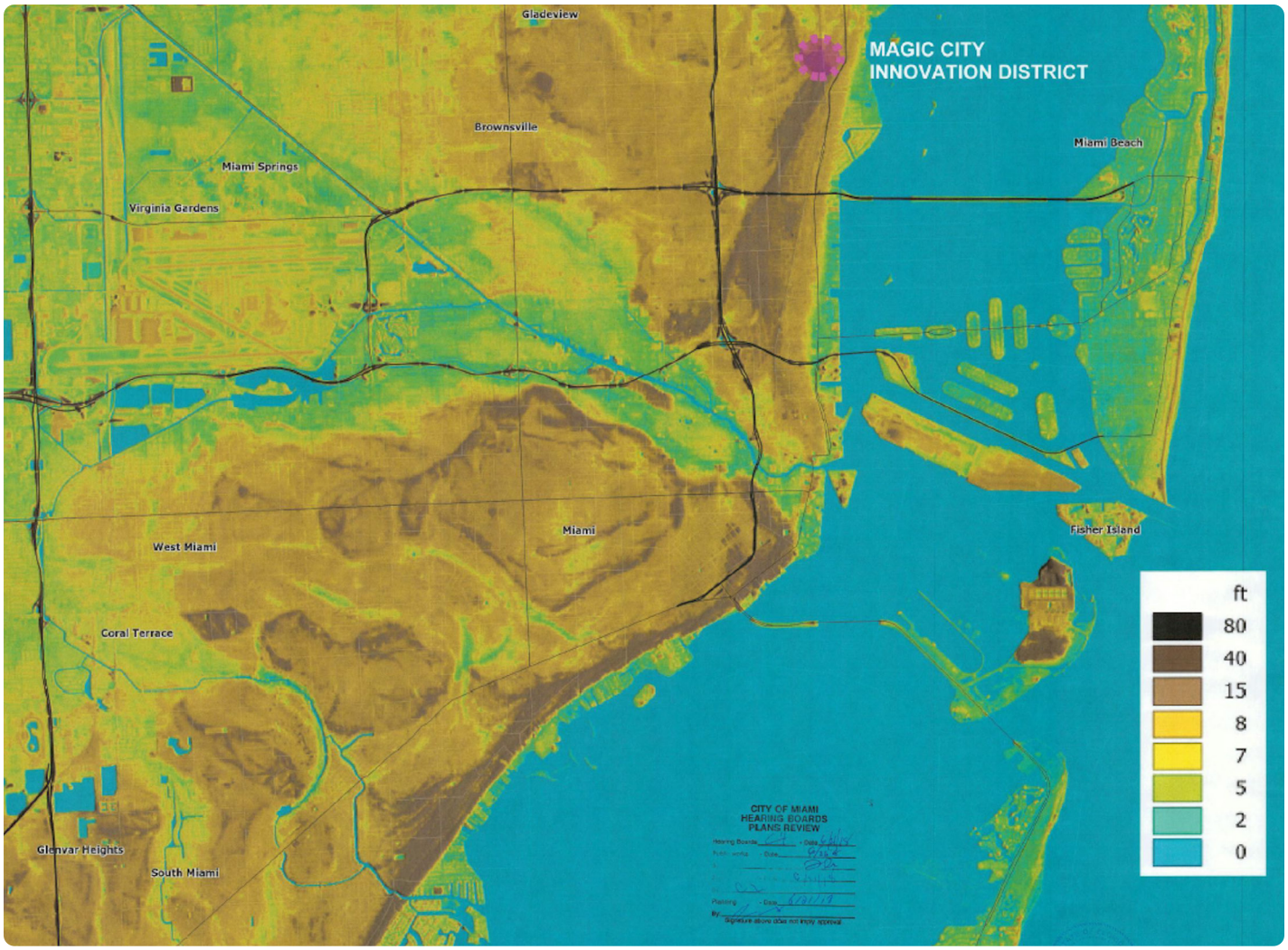


Figure 1.7: Magic City Special Area Concept Book topographic map showing the proposed innovation district on Little Haiti's highly elevated land.

directly and indirectly by attempting to mitigate the displacement of local residents through programs such as homebuyer assistance and home rehabilitation grants.

Community Benefits Agreements and Successful Negotiations as a Climate Gentrification Mitigation Strategy

Community benefits agreements (CBAs) are legally binding agreements between developers and local communities intended to mitigate the negative externalities of large-scale development projects, including resident displacement, gentrification, and the exclusion of local workers from economic opportunities. Although designed to promote equitable development, CBAs are often highly contested and politically charged, generating significant tension among community stakeholders.

The CBA associated with the Magic City Innovation District was no exception. Located just north of the Little Haiti Cultural Complex, the Magic City site had previously operated as a mobile home park and warehouse properties. Beginning around 2006, investors Tony Cho and Robert Zangrillo began

acquiring parcels (37 at the time of SAP application submission) that ultimately totaled approximately 17.75 acres. After partnering with Lune Rouge and Plaza Equity Partners, the development team submitted a Special Area Plan (SAP) application to the City of Miami in January 2018. The SAP sought substantial density, intensity, and height bonuses for the proposed project.

Project proponents framed the estimated $1.4 billion mixed-use development as a catalyst for economic growth and neighborhood revitalization. Plans included residential towers, hotels, office and retail space, and innovation-oriented commercial uses intended to position Miami as a leading technology and innovation hub. Unsurprisingly, the scale of the proposal generated significant concern among residents and activists regarding displacement, gentrification, and the future of the surrounding Little Haiti community.

> "The scale of the Magic City development proposal generated significant concern among residents and activists regarding displacement, gentrification, and the future of the surrounding Little Haiti community."

The project also attracted substantial media attention. Over the course of several months, community meetings, public zoning hearings, and informal negotiations behind closed doors took place to determine the scope and terms of the project's community benefits commitments. The development group cultivated close relationships with then–City Commissioner Keon Hardemon, and the project also received support from then-Mayor Francis Suarez, who strongly promoted Miami's emergence as a technology hub.

Aware of the potential gentrification impacts of Magic City, Marlene Bastien, director of the Family Action Network Movement (FANM) and a well-respected voice in Little Haiti, began alerting the community, leading to the establishment of Concerned Leaders of Little Haiti (CLOLH), a coalition of church leaders, business owners, and property owners with longstanding ties to the community, although many no longer resided there (Tardanico, 2025). However, realizing that CLOLH was beginning to steer toward a more accommodative strategy regarding the Magic City development, Bastien soon split from the group.

In essence, the project gained backing from CLOLH, which asserted that the City of Miami would ultimately approve the SAP regardless of local opposition. This enabled CLOLH to participate in closed-door negotiations with city officials, often to the exclusion of broader community participation, and ultimately earn a seat at the table. In contrast, Marlene Bastien, together with the Community Justice Project (CJP) and other local community organizations, advocated for a more grassroots bargaining strategy, a more participatory negotiation process, and a more robust community benefits agreement.

These contrasting views can be clearly observed in the letters submitted to the city commission. In their 1-page letter, CLOLH requested, in exchange for project support, a comprehensive community benefits agreement, a meaningful seat at the negotiation table, the retention of Little Haiti's name within Magic City signage and marketing, and a city master plan study for Little Haiti.

In contrast, Bastien, together with various community organizations, submitted a 4-page letter requesting a moratorium on all SAPs within Little Haiti. In the letter, Bastein (2019) states: "We feel this moratorium is warranted given how grossly out of sync the Magic City proposed development is with the two-story building neighborhood and Main street is overtaking." The letter then pleads: "Why the Rush? Why in all these months of heated concern have there been no impact studies? What is the timeline of the City's own soon-to-launch $4M climate gentrification study? Isn't this gentrification study going to focus in large part on this very neighborhood?" Beyond the similar requests submitted by CLOLH, Bastein's letter also called for impact analysis and impact statements, fair and equitable zoning, affordable housing and the right to remain, community control of the land, economic

empowerment, investment if preservation of cultural heritage, and reduced incentives for speculation that narrow margins for public benefits.

However, there was no turning the ship around, as it was being fueled by the growth machine that characterizes the Miami-Fort Lauderdale region, where developers have a substantial grip and influence on urban growth and local affairs. In June 2019, Miami City commissioners unanimously approved the Magic City SAP along with $31 million as part of the CBA to be administered through the establishment of the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust. This funding is intended for affordable housing, education programs, small business development, and the acquisition of properties within Little Haiti to achieve these goals. Importantly, 20% of the contribution is to be controlled by CLOLH, which would determine what programs should be funded within Little Haiti using these funds. Additional contributions include 3.8 of open public space within the SAP, which would include the Promenade du Grand Bois; local job creation and workforce participation initiatives; the reservation of 10 of the 35 Retail Merchandizing Units (mobile kiosks/ displays) within the SAP; and inclusion of the "Little Haiti" brand to be included in all SAP marketing and signage materials.

> "The competing approaches surrounding the Magic City negotiations illustrate one of the central challenges of CBAs: Community representation is often fragmented, internally contested, and politically divisive."

It is important to note that the $31 million is not disbursed in a lump sum. Rather, $6 million was provided upon the initial approval of the SAP, while the remaining $25 million is tied to the subsequent approval of future development permits and may be disbursed over 30 years, with no adjustment for inflation. This has significant implications for program planning and budgeting, as the timing of future payments is uncertain, and the lack of inflation adjustment may erode purchasing power and reduce program capacity.

While city officials praised the agreement, critics such as Bastien, and even members of CLOLH, argued that these financial contributions were miniscule compared to the magnitude and the anticipated profits of Magic City. They also contended that, due to the agreement's limited affordable housing protections, the funds were insufficient to offset the displacement pressures that the development itself was expected to intensify. In fact, shortly after the establishment of the Trust, a strategic playbook was developed outlining its planning goals and vision while acknowledging the following: "$31 million is not insignificant, but not nearly enough. Given the scope of the issues the Trust is facing, total investment to achieve those goals is closer to $80 to $100 Million over the next ten years" (Little Haiti Revitalization Trust, n.d., p. 50).

Aside from the financial shortcomings of the CBA, CLOLH has also expressed their dissatisfaction with the program planning and with the manner in which the city navigated negotiations. For example, although recipients of the small business grants must operate within the official boundaries of Little Haiti, business owners may reside elsewhere, leaving some CLOLH members concerned that resources and capital are not necessarily remaining within the community.

The competing approaches surrounding the Magic City negotiations illustrate one of the central challenges of CBAs: Community representation is often fragmented, internally contested, and politically divisive. The Little Haiti Case Study provides important lessons learned for charting out more successful and comprehensive CBAs:

1. A unified community voice is critical to strengthening the bargaining capacity of local communities during CBA negotiations.
2. The absence of a cohesive community voice benefits developers at the expense of more comprehensive CBA terms.
3. A highly accommodative strategy may result in tokenistic outcomes at the expense of greater local control over resources and meaningful community involvement.

4. A highly anti-development approach may result in exclusion from official community engagement processes and CBA negotiations altogether.

It is important to recognize that even the most robust CBAs are unlikely to fully eliminate the negative externalities associated with large-scale urban redevelopment. While CBAs can secure tangible community investments and protections, they generally cannot reverse broader market forces that drive gentrification, rising property values and rents, or the exclusion of existing residents and businesses from newly created housing, commercial spaces, and economic opportunities.

In the case of the Magic City Innovation District, for example, many long-term Little Haiti residents are unlikely to be able to afford the development's market-rate housing, while numerous local small businesses may find it financially prohibitive to relocate within the district once redevelopment is complete. Consequently, even a well-designed CBA cannot entirely prevent displacement or ensure that existing residents and businesses directly benefit from the economic transformation occurring around them. It is therefore imperative to empirically analyze the extent to which CBAs can meaningfully address the social and economic consequences of climate gentrification and small business displacement. Such analysis should critically assess not only the benefits and protections these agreements provide, but also their limitations and overall effectiveness in preserving long-term business stability amid accelerating urban redevelopment.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: CBAs AND THEIR IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESS GRANTEES

To date, the JPMC and LHRT obtained survey responses from 12 of the 20 businesses that were recipients of small business grants. On average, these businesses have operated in Little Haiti for 15.3 years, demonstrating both strong community rootedness and an ability to withstand periods of economic volatility. As one respondent noted, "Our business has always been rooted in the Little Haiti community, where our clientele has grown naturally through word of mouth and the trust we've built over time." Nine of the 12 businesses employed five or fewer workers, with the majority employing only one or two individuals. Additionally, 58% of respondents reported that local Little Haiti residents made up their primary customer base.

Ten out of the 12 businesses, or 83%, currently lease their commercial property, placing them at a significant disadvantage as they remain highly vulnerable to rising market rents imposed by landlords. For nine of the 12 businesses, the LHRT grant represented the only form of financial assistance they had ever

Little Haiti Lessons for Successful and Comprehensive CBAs



A unified community voice is critical to strengthening the bargaining capacity of local communities during CBA negotiations.



The absence of a cohesive community voice benefits developers at the expense of more comprehensive CBA terms.



A highly accommodative strategy may result in tokenistic outcomes at the expense of greater local control over resources and meaningful community involvement.



A highly anti-development approach may result in exclusion from official community engagement processes and CBA negotiations altogether.

received. Overall, respondents averaged only 1.4 loans or grants, highlighting the limited access to financial support available to these businesses prior to receiving LHRT assistance. Seven of the 12 businesses used grant funds for remodeling or interior/exterior repairs, while five used the funds for marketing and outreach efforts. One business used the grant to acquire new technological equipment to expand services, while another used the funding to help cover rent expenses.

Only 3 of the 12 businesses reported doing well financially, while the remaining 9 indicated ongoing financial difficulties. Two of these businesses described themselves as being in "survival mode," with one respondent explaining that "local businesses are feeling the impact of the economy and of high inflation. We struggle to keep goods at [a] low price because everything is now more expensive." Another business reported that a significant portion of its customer base had been displaced due to gentrification, noting:

> *Although the grant has helped strengthen certain aspects of our business . . . gentrification within the community has resulted in the loss of many of our long-time customers, as displacement continues to affect the neighborhood. . . . Coupled with broader economic hardships affecting everyday working individuals, these factors have significantly impacted our business.*

Similarly, another respondent echoed these concerns, stating that their major preoccupation was that "residents are being relocated to cheaper housing." High rental costs emerged as one of the most common concerns among respondents. One business owner noted that rent had become highly burdensome: "Our landlord increased the triple net by almost 75% of the rent." The same respondent further explained that "[rent] makes it nearly impossible for a business like ours to operate in Miami."

"*Although the grant has helped strengthen certain aspects of our business ... gentrification within the community has resulted in the loss of many of our long-time customers, as displacement continues to affect the neighborhood.*"

Four of the 12 businesses indicated that they had considered relocating elsewhere, with three of these citing the need to find lower rents as the primary reason. However, the remaining eight businesses that had not considered relocating demonstrated a strong commitment to remaining within the community. As one respondent stated, "[relocating has] NEVER CROSSED MY MIND, I LOVE LITTLE HAITI, THIS IS MY HOME" (capitalization in original response). Another respondent similarly noted that "Little Haiti is home. Our customers are friends and some are more like family. We feel that there will be light at the end of the tunnel."

Finally, 10 of the 12 respondents indicated that they were aware of climate change and sea-level rise. However, only five of the 12 respondents perceived climate change as directly impacting their business operations. One respondent linked climate change to displacement pressures, noting that "[the] Little Haiti community are being bought out and pushed out." Another respondent expressed concern over the direct operational impacts of climate change, stating that it is affecting business activity by "scaring away customers, extremely hot summers damage air conditioning units and the list goes on." Similarly, another respondent expressed:

> *Little Haiti is where I was born and raised, a place that has shaped my identity and instilled in me the cultural values, resilience, and sense of purpose that define who I am today. Losing connection to this community would be a profound personal and professional loss.*

Analysis and Recommendations

Due to Little Haiti's topographical advantage, sea-level rise and the installation of water pumps and drainage infrastructure have not been as immediate or pressing concerns as they are in lower-lying and more affluent neighborhoods such as Miami Beach. As a result, local community leaders have instead prioritized issues such as affordable housing, access to essential services, and improved transportation infrastructure, recognizing these as more urgent needs for protecting community stability and preventing displacement. For these reasons, during the early negotiation phases of the CBA, grassroots activists expressed significant concern over displacement impacts and the need for adequate affordable housing provisions.

As the survey results demonstrate, however, the grants these businesses received through the CBA have not been sufficient to offset the mounting pressures associated with rising rental costs and the loss of local customers due to displacement. For many of these businesses, Haitian and other local residents constitute a substantial share of their customer base; consequently, climate gentrification and the broader displacement of long-term residents have significant impacts on business activity, customer retention, and overall revenue generation.

Although CBAs can help mitigate the impacts of large-scale developments, their effectiveness depends on community capacity, available resources, and, most importantly, the extent to which local stakeholders can remain unified as competing socioeconomic and political interests emerge. As this case study demonstrates, a highly accommodative strategy may result in tokenism at the expense of greater local control over community resources and decision-making. This is illustrated by CLOLH, which, although it secured a seat at the negotiation table, ultimately exercised only limited control over community resources and the allocation of CBA funding.

At the other end of the spectrum, an anti-development approach may result in exclusion from official community affairs and CBA negotiations altogether, as was the case for Bastien and other partner community organizations. These findings suggest that divisions within the local community can weaken collective bargaining power and ultimately compromise the negotiation of a robust CBA. A key lesson from this case study is that community organizations seeking to negotiate comprehensive CBAs should prioritize resolving internal disputes and reconciling competing visions before entering negotiations. Doing so requires recognizing that an overly accommodative approach may weaken bargaining leverage, while outright opposition to development may result in exclusion from the negotiation process.

The most effective strategy therefore lies in maintaining a unified community coalition that is willing to negotiate while preserving sufficient independence and leverage to secure meaningful, enforceable community benefits. At its current stage of development, the LHRT can implement several strategies to expand its programmatic capacity and increase resources available to the community, which we detail in our recommendations.

Recommendations for the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust

1. **Amend the community benefits agreement to better target benefits to most pressing needs of businesses and community.**
2. **Create an Economic Opportunity Revitalization Fund.**
3. **Create a Little Haiti Community Land Trust (CLT).**

RECOMMENDATION 1: AMEND THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENT

It has been 8 years since the CBA was negotiated with the Magic City project developers. Further, to date only $5 of the $31 million CBA funding has been committed. Since the implementation of the CBA, changes have taken place in Little Haiti, and further changes will occur as the result of the termination of Temporary Protective Status (TPS). In addition, much has been learned by the LHRT regarding program activity and community impact.

It is recommended, once the Magic City project is prepared to move forward, that the City of Miami re-negotiate the CBA to reflect current economic and social conditions to more clearly target benefits to reflect the most pressing needs of Little Haiti businesses and community at large.

RECOMMENDATION 2: CREATE AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY REVITALIZATION FUND

Given the small business financing gaps that exist in Little Haiti, it is recommended that the City of Miami and LHRT create an "economic opportunity mobilization fund" to provide small businesses lines of credit and other forms of start-up capital. The proposed fund has been a program recommendation used by the JPMC in other community economic plans, including the MLK Jr. Corridor in the City of Fort Myers, Florida. The fund would involve a collaborative of lenders and investors offering alternative strategies and sources focused on micro-businesses. Other elements would include the following:

- LHRT management of the fund
- A platform for matching small businesses with grants and capital, including online matching services, lender referrals, and loan products
- Oversight of an "impact measurement and management system" for assessing the social impact of community investments

Impact investing can play a central role in realizing the vision of Little Haiti's revitalization by setting and raising the standards for investment practice and generating the tools and data that allow investors to evaluate impact and channel capital to the most effective solutions.

RECOMMENDATION 3: CREATE A LITTLE HAITI COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

The LHRT should consider working with local partners in creating a Little Haiti Community Land Trust (CLT) that would provide homeownership for Little Haiti residents and business owners. A CLT can benefit low-income Little Haiti households by providing access to affordable housing in high-cost, service-industry-dependent areas while keeping housing affordable for future residents. Just as importantly, the CLT model can be used to capture the value of public investment for long-term community benefit.

The CLT is a partner in the ownership process, giving homeowners access to many of the benefits of traditional ownership, along with a network of support to help ensure their ongoing success. CLT homeowner support would include:

- Pre-purchase homebuyer counseling and educational materials specific to the CLT
- A pool of mortgage lenders educated about the CLT and willing to provide mortgages to qualified homebuyers
- A pool of attorneys trained on the CLT and the City/CLT closing process
- Pre and post-purchase workshops, resources, and referrals to assist with common first-time homeowner questions

Additionally, the fact that the LHRT grant represents the only form of financial assistance received by most of these businesses demonstrates a significant unmet need for continued support, particularly given the substantial economic challenges they currently face. Another possible future strategy would involve the LHRT partnering with FIU's College of Business and the Florida SBDC Network to provide local businesses with access to highly experienced business consultants who offer confidential, no-cost advising services to entrepreneurs and small business owners seeking to stabilize and grow their operations.

Although Florida SBDC centers do not directly provide loans or investment capital, they assist businesses and entrepreneurs in identifying and pursuing external sources of financing, including commercial loans, grants, and equity-investment opportunities.

They also provide technical guidance on business planning, financial management, marketing, and long-term growth strategies. A robust and sustainable Little Haiti business alliance could serve as a strategic anchor against small-business displacement and the escalating pressures associated with climate-driven gentrification. Specific services that could be provided through the FIU SBDC partnership could include:

- Access to Capital: From preparing loan applications to connecting businesses with vetted lenders, SBDC consultants guide businesses through financing options tailored to specific business needs.
- Start-Up Services: The SBDC helps businesses understand business strategies, access market research, and innovate with confidence through one-on-one consulting and resource support.
- Government Contracting: The SBDC partners with the Florida APEX Accelerator at FIU to unlock access to federal, state, and local government contracting opportunities.

The Caribbean Marketplace once functioned as the center of Little Haiti's business activity and is seen by both the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust and Little Haiti Cultural Center as central to growing and preserving Little Haiti's economy and cultural heritage. Another potential strategy is to have the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust (LHRT) serve as the lead nonprofit and hub for generating the financial network and the Little Haiti Cultural Complex and Caribbean Marketplace serve as the physical anchor for activity pertaining to small business development in the surrounding area. The strategy could also involve support for the Little Haiti Cultural Center's programming. Art and culture are fundamental to Little Haiti's identity and can serve as a catalyst to engage specific cultural communities in meeting the challenges of neighborhood change by helping to craft and embrace a vision of an inclusive community future.

> "A broader lesson emerging from the Magic City case study is that the success of a CBA depends as much on the governance and negotiation process as on the financial commitments ultimately secured."

Despite the challenges, many of the businesses surveyed remained determined to stay rooted in Little Haiti, viewing the neighborhood not simply as a commercial location, but as their home and community. As an anti-displacement strategy against climate gentrification, this study demonstrates that comprehensive CBAs must be negotiated in a manner that addresses the full impacts of climate-driven speculative real estate investment and the broader socioeconomic pressures associated with displacement.

Conclusion

As discussed in the previous sections, climate gentrification does not emerge independently of existing redevelopment pressures; rather, it intensifies longstanding patterns of displacement affecting communities of color. As Taylor and Aalbers (2022) assert:

> *Climate gentrification plays out on top of—and cannot be empirically separated from—existing patterns of gentrification, which in this context is marked both by large-scale, state-sanctioned redevelopment projects planned for the area, like the billion-dollar Magic City Innovation District in Little Haiti.*

In addition, the deliberate framing that the developers employed highlighting Little Haiti's topography as a resilience mechanism against sea-level rise illustrates how resilience can be politicized in different ways and, in some cases, reinforce racially uneven patterns of urban development (Grove et al., 2024).

A broader lesson emerging from the Magic City case study is that the success of a CBA depends as much on the governance and negotiation process as on the financial commitments ultimately secured. CBAs are most effective when they are negotiated through transparent, inclusive, and representative processes that enable communities to speak with a coordinated voice. At the same time, the case demonstrates that

neither unconditional accommodation nor uncompromising opposition is likely to maximize community outcomes. As our case study showed, in cities or urban centers where real-estate developers' powers are deeply rooted and have significant political backing (the growth machine), taking an anti-development approach or being highly critical may result in complete exclusion from the negotiation table, regardless of how well intended the local community's wishes may be.

Equally important is ensuring that benefit commitments are sufficient in scale, protected against inflation, and tied to clear implementation timelines. As our case study demonstrates, the absence of inflation adjustments—particularly for payments that may be disbursed over as much as 30 years and are contingent upon future development permits—creates significant challenges for long-term program planning and introduces ongoing uncertainty for the LHRT. Moreover, with the exception of standardized calculations for density bonuses and affordable housing requirements, CBA funding is typically negotiated rather than empirically derived from a comprehensive assessment of a project's social and economic impacts. Consequently, CBAs are unlikely to fully offset the displacement and other negative externalities (including gentrification) that large-scale developments may impose on surrounding communities.

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APPENDIX A:
LITTLE HAITI BUSINESS SURVEY INSTRUMENT

This survey instrument was administered to small business in Little Haiti that have received a small business grant through the Magic City Community Benefits Agreement and the Little Haiti Revitalization Trust.

APPENDIX B:
GENTRIFICATION INDICATOR ANALYSIS

This table analyzes the various indicators used to measure gentrification in Miami's Little Haiti between 2018 and 2024.

Chapter 2

Resisting Climate Gentrification Through Grassroots Organizing of Small Businesses in South Central Los Angeles

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Figure 2.1: A community mural painted near the Rail to Rail project as part of a climate resilience project in South Central Los Angeles, 2025.

Executive Summary

In the face of climate change and global warming, municipalities across California are passing climate resilience policies and investing in strategies to combat greenhouse gas emissions, extreme heat, wildfires, and pollution. These climate-resilient initiatives often materialize as improvements to the built environment, such as solar-panel programs for property owners, green infrastructure, new eco-friendly transit corridors with bike lanes, and climate-resilient housing development projects. While these interventions aim to mitigate environmental harms and build community resilience, they can also transform, modernize, and beautify the surrounding areas, which later attracts new development projects and higher-income residents.

As neighborhoods change due to climate-related improvements, property value, cost of living, and rent often go up, while wages or small business profits do not. This can lead to shifts in who can afford to live and operate businesses there. This outcome increases the risk of displacement for both residential and commercial tenants who were already part of the community. This pattern of displacement is what we refer to as climate gentrification in the climate disaster-prevention stage. Through grassroots organizing, in-person community engagement, and coalition building, the Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) commercial tenant protection team has documented the experiences of over 200 small business owners who are commercial tenants in South Central Los Angeles, highlighting how climate investments have impacted their businesses and the neighborhood where they operate.

This case study examines how climate-resilient investments, while necessary, can contribute to climate gentrification when they are not paired with strong commercial tenant protections or funding for policy advocacy. This has been the situation in the existing climate-resilient investments in South Central Los Angeles. These investments can leave small business owners vulnerable to rising rent, as commercial landlords use harassment tactics involving the civil justice system to evict commercial tenants, or they may simply pressure tenants, through intimidation, to self-evict.

Climate gentrification occurs in part due to public officials designing climate improvement orders without accounting for the fact that most small business owners in South Central Los Angeles are also commercial tenants. This classification matters

because there are important differences between how climate investments benefit commercial landlords and commercial tenants. Unlike the city's residential tenants, commercial tenants are not protected by rent-stabilization ordinances, intentional eviction-prevention policies, and other common tenant rights. While climate investments can raise residential and commercial property values in surrounding communities, they can also trigger commercial rents to increase significantly, which can ultimately price out small businesses.

> "Climate-resilient investments, while necessary, can contribute to climate gentrification when they are not paired with strong commercial tenant protections or funding for policy advocacy."

Urban planning scholars Ryun Jung Lee and Galen Newman explain that "environmental improvements such as vacant lots repurposed as green space and redeveloped vacant land both have the potential to induce gentrification in neighborhoods through increased property value" (Lee & Newman, 2021). Because small business owners are rarely recognized as commercial tenants in public discussions, this kind of displacement has largely gone unnoticed and is often overlooked by elected officials and climate groups working to address climate change challenges.

Introduction: How Climate Investment Leads to Climate Gentrification

Since 2019, SAJE has been a key partner in California's Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) initiative. Through the TCC initiative, the State of California approved the creation of the South LA Eco-Lab as part of a broader effort to reduce pollution and advance community-led climate solutions in South Central Los Angeles. The South LA Eco-Lab is supported by a $35 million grant from TCC and uses a collective impact approach to improve environmental conditions while promoting equitable development in the region (Phillips, 2024). The South LA Eco-Lab includes 12 climate resilience projects over a 5-year period designed to bring green infrastructure to underserved neighborhoods like South Central Los Angeles, such as solar panel installations, cool roofs, tree planting, heat-resistant pavement, and improved mobility options, including green public transportation, E-bike programs, bike lanes, electric vehicle-sharing programs, and EV-charging stations.

As part of the South LA Eco-Lab, SAJE was contracted to lead the Displacement Avoidance Project (DAP). DAP's core responsibilities include conducting community outreach to share information about the Eco-Lab's climate resilience projects and resources. In addition, SAJE was responsible for raising awareness about eviction-prevention resources for residential and commercial tenants, including hosting eight know-your-rights workshops and partnering with legal service providers to host eight legal clinics over a 4-year period. In the legal clinics, partner attorneys provided 30-minute consultations to both residential and commercial tenants but did not have the capacity to offer full legal representation. As we implemented DAP, we came to understand that these efforts were not enough to protect small businesses from eviction, rent increases, or harassment from commercial landlords.

In South Central Los Angeles, small businesses are currently feeling the effects of climate gentrification. When referring to small businesses, we use the definition given in the Commercial Tenant Protection Act (SB 1103): "microenterprises with five or fewer employees, restaurants employing nine or fewer workers, and nonprofits with fewer than twenty employees that contribute vital economic and cultural resources that sustain social networks and communities" (Public Counsel, 2018). Small businesses—such as restaurants, mechanic shops, bike shops, mini markets, barber shops, retail stores, and beauty salons—are a big part of what keeps a community's local economy resilient and vibrant. Many are owned by people of color, women, and

immigrant entrepreneurs. These businesses help create spaces that bring community members and families together, keeping neighborhood culture alive.

As the state of California invests in South Central Los Angeles to meet its climate goals, small businesses are facing hardships tied to these changes. While these climate-resilient investments bring transformation, beautification, and improvements to community health, they can also contribute to climate gentrification. As property values increase and new development pressures grow, rent and operating costs rise, which can push out long-standing small businesses, many of which are commercial tenants.

Since August 2023, SAJE has focused on understanding the climate gentrification challenges small business owners face in South Central Los Angeles. SAJE community organizers, with the support of interns, have engaged with hundreds of commercial tenants to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Focus groups were one of the methods used to examine how climate investments were shaping local communities, how small businesses were weathering changes, and what policies and interventions were missing in the effort to guarantee small businesses remain in place and continue serving their communities.

> “SAJE gathered input directly from small business owners about their day-to-day experiences, including unfair treatment by commercial landlords.”

For instance, focus group participant Omar Garcia, owner of Graphics and Signs, said, “What I’ve noticed all around the neighborhood is that they are closing the streets to make bicycle lanes, which is affecting the traffic and everything else.” Another small business owner, Romaldo Mancilla from the LA Trophy Guy, said, “I’d witnessed tree planting and new building developments.” When asked whether they thought these climate investments were good for business, Mardoqueo Equite said, “What they want are businesses different from ours… like large corporations, phone companies, or very expensive restaurants, not businesses like ours.” (For more on our focus group conversation, see Appendix A.)

SAJE learned about the issue of climate gentrification as community organizers engaged on a weekly basis with small business owners as part of our DAP’s community outreach. Through weekly in-person community engagement, two focus groups, many one-on-one house visit conversations, and the collection of surveys, SAJE gathered input directly from small business owners about their day-to-day experiences, including unfair treatment by commercial landlords, many of whom are corporate landlords. These conversations revealed the challenges faced by commercial tenants, including rising rent, landlord harassment, lease non-renewals, displacement, and other displacement pressures.

Across this work, SAJE saw clear patterns, especially steep and often unaffordable rent increases in areas where climate investments are happening. For example, the Rail to Rail project added bike lanes and safe walking paths along Slauson, helping residents connect between METRO train stations and rapid bus lines. In May 2024, SAJE met 11 small business owners near Main and 59th Streets, less than a quarter of a mile from the Rail to Rail project. These business owners were facing rent increases of up to 200%. Many shared that their landlord was aware of the nearby Slauson Rail to Rail project bringing bike lanes and pedestrian paths to the neighborhood, and that the landlord was leveraging those improvements to raise rent.

Many of the tenants viewed the intention of the corporate commercial landlord to be replacing long-standing tenants, some of whom had been there for over a decade and couldn’t afford the rent increases, with new businesses that could pay the market-rate rent. Tenants also shared that their landlord told them they had to either pay the rent increase or leave. These commercial tenants also described harassment tactics used by their landlord, including shutting off water and electricity,

overcharging for utilities, and failing to provide trash pickup. These conditions made it harder for businesses to operate and welcome customers. Although utilities were the landlord's responsibility, they attempted to pass these costs onto tenants by increasing the rent to cover the fees, further adding financial burden to small businesses. These examples illustrate the displacement pressures small businesses face and how climate investments contribute to displacement pressures.

Hearing stories like these through our community engagement efforts led SAJE to establish the Small Business Alliance (SBA), which meets on a monthly basis. At SBA meetings, SAJE organizers create a community-organizing space using a popular education model that fosters safe and open dialogue among small business owners. Through the SBA, SAJE facilitates know-your-rights conversations and leadership training to support small business owners in understanding the political landscape.

For example, we did training to explore how laws are passed in the City of Los Angeles, how small businesses could identify their own council members, and how to reach out to council members to communicate their needs as small business owners. These meetings create a space for participants to share their experiences, discuss challenges and urgent needs, learn about resources to slow down displacement, and build knowledge together to help coordinate collective action through political participation to address common struggles.

SAJE facilitates monthly meetings that bring business owners, advocates, and organizers together. Since forming the SBA, SAJE has partnered with government agencies, community-based organizations, and legal service providers that support commercial tenants and street vendors. These partnerships have been critical in strengthening and refining SAJE's case for policy change at the state, county, and city levels. Together, we are working to advance policies that protect commercial tenants from the unintended impacts of local climate investments. (To learn more about the SAJE Small Business Alliance, see Appendix B.)

These partnerships have also helped SAJE launch a commercial tenant campaign to codify a set of protections in the City of Los Angeles, including a Commercial Rent Registry for both rented and vacant units, stronger lease protections, relocation assistance, and a Commercial Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance (Los Angeles City Council, 2026). These campaign demands reflect commercial tenants' concerns expressed in focus groups, canvassing, survey, and SBA meetings. They also reflect SAJE's commitment to the belief that all people should have fair and equitable access to city resources, especially businesses that are so vital to the economies and cultures of local communities throughout Los Angeles. We believe climate-resilient development and existing communities can coexist if climate investments come with commercial tenant protections that are crafted with equity, anti-displacement protections, and inclusion in mind.

> "This case study focuses on the real experiences of small business owners and how climate investments are affecting their ability to stay open."

Ultimately, we found that while climate investments are often framed as broadly beneficial solutions to climate change, they are frequently planned and implemented without meaningful input from local small business owners. As a result, the benefits of these investments are unevenly distributed, and many small business owners, who are part of the communities these projects aim to serve, face increased economic pressure and risk of displacement as neighborhoods rapidly change.

Building on these findings, this case study focuses on the real experiences of small business owners and how climate investments are affecting their ability to stay open. It draws from what business owners have shared with us, along with our direct work supporting them, including trying to connect them to resources

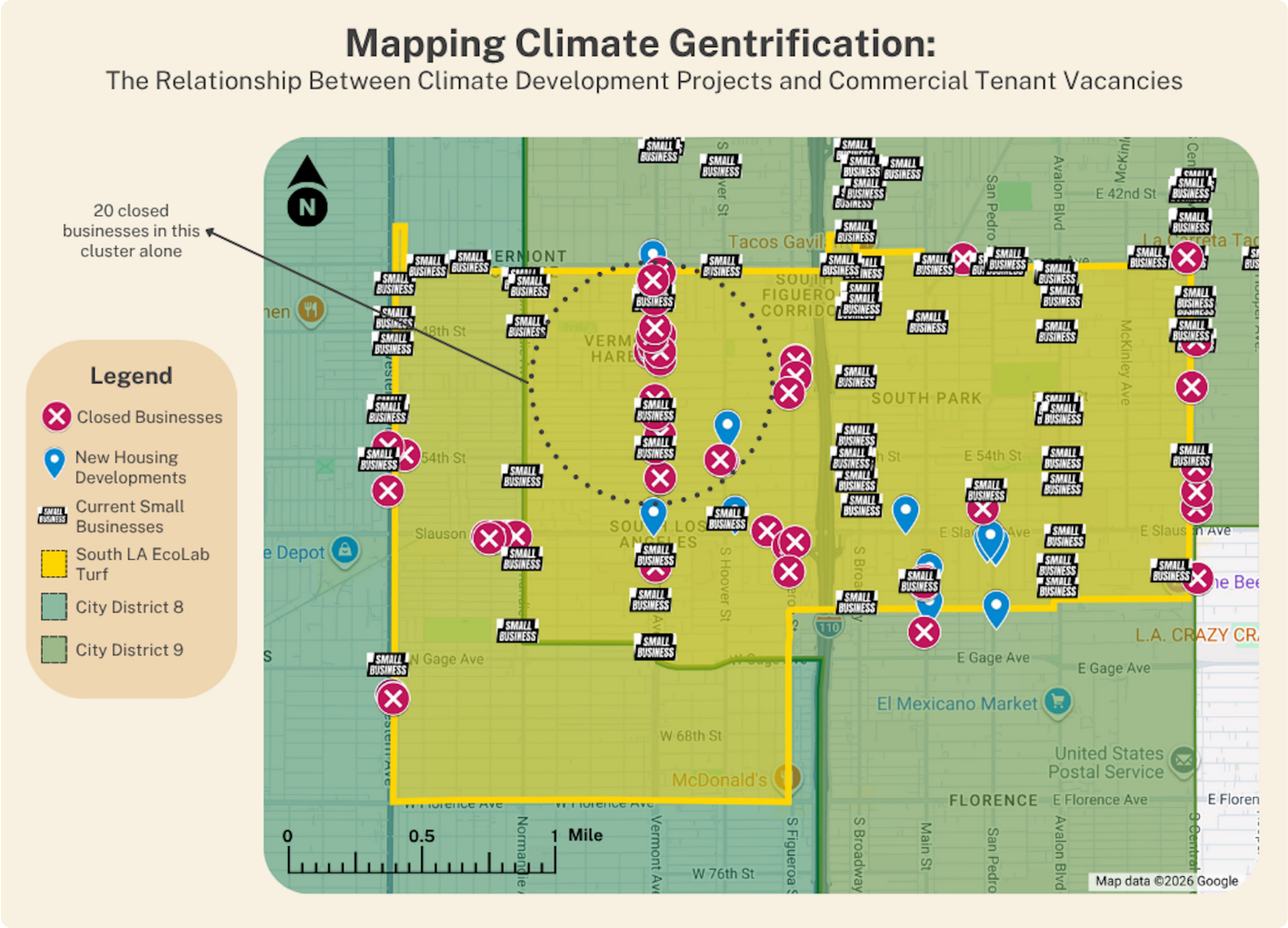


Figure 2.2: Map of Los Angeles Businesses That Have Closed Within the State's Transformative Climate Communities Funding Area

that are often out of reach. Time and again, we met business owners who needed financial help but did not qualify for programs like small business loans because of strict requirements, such as having a strong credit score or no existing debt, even though they are applying for these resources to deal with rising rent, utility bills, and other costs tied to changes in their neighborhoods. This case study highlights the urgent need to pair climate investments with funding for advocacy for policies that protect commercial tenants from being pushed out by the very changes meant to benefit their communities. (For more information on how climate investment leads to climate gentrification, see Appendix C.)

Case Study Approach

We began assembling our case study by asking ourselves why climate investments were coming to South Central Los Angeles. We found that State of California public officials view climate-resilient investments as ways to alleviate the environmental harms caused by decades of industrial pollution in the area of South Central Los Angeles, including a specific focus on the Slauson Avenue business corridor between Central and Western Avenues. For much of the 20th century, this corridor was shaped by a concentration of large industrial corporations, including tire manufacturers Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company and U.S. Electric Motors Company, as well

as other manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, and trucking operations (Urban Land Institute Los Angeles, 2018). These industries operated in close proximity to residential and small commercial areas, bringing environmental harms such as air pollution into the surrounding communities.

Research shows that residents' prolonged exposure to industrial pollution and diesel emissions has contributed to negative health impacts, including elevated rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic and long-term health conditions. According to the Neighborhood Data for Social Change, South Central Los Angeles residents struggle from

> *poor air quality, contaminated drinking water, and limited green space. Residents experience exposure to toxic releases at a rate higher than 65% of other areas in LA County. Living in proximity to these pollutants heightens the risk of poor health outcomes, such as heart and lung disease, cancer, and increased mortality. (Phillips, 2024).*

Nevertheless, beyond the community health impacts, decades of pollution have also contributed to global warming, further highlighting the urgent need for government officials to take action through meaningful, climate-resilient investments that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Drawing on secondary sources, including government reports, environmental impact studies, and peer-reviewed research analyses, SAJE also explored how land use and zoning decisions concentrated industrial activity and environmental risk in South Central Los Angeles, explaining why the Slauson Corridor has been identified as a priority site for state and locally funded climate investments aimed at improving air

Figure 2.3: Pollution in Downtown Los Angeles, 2024.



quality, mitigating environmental harm, and promoting public health.

For example, the Rail to Rail project was supposed to motivate local residents to bike more and get more cars off the street, helping achieve California's climate goals by 2030. However, we have observed that the bike paths, at the moment, are not widely used by local residents. This raises an important question for future research: How can South Central residents be encouraged to use the bike lanes more often without concerns about displacement? Our research provides a foundation for understanding the cumulative environmental and public health impacts that South Central Los Angeles communities have experienced as a result of decades of pollution, highlighting the area's history of environmental injustice.

We also examined California's climate policy framework and the actions taken by state and local governments to address environmental injustice and advance climate resilience solutions. Many of these actions have taken the form of publicly funded climate investments, including residential solar panel programs, urban tree-planting initiatives, the development of green community spaces, decarbonization mandates, and the expansion of bike lanes and active transportation infrastructure.

> "We examined whether climate investments incorporated intentional strategies or funding to address displacement pressures."

As part of this analysis, we examined whether climate investments incorporated intentional strategies or funding to address displacement pressures that arise from neighborhood beautification and green infrastructure improvements. This included assessing whether existing resources and resources provided by these investments are sufficient to help commercial tenants avoid no-fault evictions. We also looked at whether resources are being used for anti-displacement measures, such as funding policy advocacy for stronger commercial tenant protections and continuing financial support for small businesses facing constant rent increases. These measures are especially important as climate investments improve neighborhoods, which can increase property value and rent, and put existing small businesses at greater risk of displacement.

Third, SAJE strengthened this case study by drawing on findings from our weekly community engagement efforts with small business owners throughout South Central Los Angeles. We began with in-person canvassing to better understand how business owners viewed the climate resilience projects coming to their communities, their experiences as commercial tenants, and the challenges they faced as their neighborhoods changed. Through this outreach, we conducted a mixed-methods study that included two focus groups, collection of 150 surveys, monthly Small Business Alliance (SBA) meetings beginning summer of 2024, and ongoing conversations in which business owners shared their personal experiences, concerns, and needs.

During the focus groups, we asked participants about their businesses, their understanding of local climate investments, whether they had experienced rent increase, the number of employees they had, their customer base, and the types of policies or support they believed would help them thrive while these investments were upgrading their community. We transcribed and analyzed these conversations, and the findings helped inform our campaign strategy, organizing efforts, and policy recommendations for stronger commercial tenant protections.

The survey, developed based on themes from the focus groups, was administered during our canvassing efforts and collected 150 responses over nearly a year. The information gathered helped us better understand how climate investments are affecting small businesses and their livelihoods. Over time, these community engagement efforts evolved into the creation of the SBA, a space where small business owners could come together and continue organizing, sharing their experiences, and building collective solutions to address their struggles and



Figure 2.4: The SAJE Small Business Alliance meets monthly to organize for commercial tenant protections.

needs. (To learn more about the survey findings, see Appendix D.)

Last, we gathered primary source information through our SBA members. These member-led conversations helped surface common patterns of displacement pressures, gaps in existing climate programs and resources, and the cumulative effects of neighborhood transformation on small businesses. These primary sources were analyzed alongside secondary resources, including policy documents, planning and zoning reports, economic analyses, and peer-reviewed academic research on climate gentrification and environmental justice. This integrated research analysis centers lived experience while situating it within broader structural, economic, and policy-level dynamics.

About Strategic Actions for a Just Economy

SAJE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in South Central Los Angeles advancing racial and economic justice through community organizing, policy advocacy, and research. SAJE's work integrates direct services, grassroots organizing, and policy development to build community power and address structural inequities. Through direct services, SAJE equips residential and commercial tenants with the knowledge and available resources to understand and defend their rights. Through community organizing, tenants develop leadership skills, engage in civic processes, and advocate for policies that transform their material conditions. SAJE's policy development work is rooted in the everyday experiences of our members, ensuring that community-informed solutions drive systemic change. Central to this approach is our anti-displacement work, which seeks to prevent displacement of residents and small businesses through policy advocacy.

SAJE is also a recognized leader in environmental justice work, with a focus on advancing climate justice while preventing climate-driven displacement. SAJE has led policy initiatives on building decarbonization, extreme heat, and green public housing, ensuring that climate investments benefit communities rather than displace them. In 2025, SAJE engaged 47 members to participate in a focus group on their experiences with extreme indoor heat,



Figure 2.5: SAJE staff canvassing and conducting surveys with small businesses in South Central Los Angeles.

informing the report *A Renter's Right to Cooling: Addressing Extreme Heat in Rental Housing*, which contributed to the successful passage of an indoor cooling ordinance for Los Angeles County's unincorporated areas (Kirk, 2025). SAJE also authored *Tenants at the Center: An Equitable Path to Building Decarbonization*, which advances tenant-centered approaches to climate policy (Kirk et al., 2025). (To read the full reports, see Appendices E, F, and G.)

In partnership with the California Energy Commission on Building Performance Standards, SAJE has played a leading role in developing equity impact metrics for small businesses across California through SB 48 (2023). This work highlights the intersection of climate policy and economic displacement, emphasizing the need for protections that ensure small businesses are not adversely impacted by new climate-resilient building performance standards, which include decarbonization efforts. By centering equity in climate investments and advocating for anti-displacement protections, SAJE continues to advance a climate justice framework that addresses climate gentrification and promotes community stability.

Neighborhood Context: South Central Los Angeles

South Central Los Angeles is a vibrant working-class neighborhood, home to around 145,000 residents, the majority of whom are Black and Brown (Census Reporter, 2024). The household median income is around $54,000, which is lower than many other parts of the city, and 22% of residents live below the poverty line (Census Reporter, 2024). Its compact, 8.6 square miles boast thousands of small businesses, including mini markets, thrift stores, barber shops,

clothing shops, beauty salons, auto repair shops, restaurants, nutrition stores, bike shops, and tax preparation services. For residents without cars, the nearest grocery options are the local mini markets and convenience stores.

The area has a long history of systemic disinvestment and community resistance, particularly following the 1992 beating of Rodney King by four police officers from the Los Angeles Police Department who were later acquitted (Ong et al., 2018). The verdict triggered a multiday uprising against police brutality, during which more than 1,000 small, locally owned businesses in South Central Los Angeles were burned to the ground, with property damage in excess of $1 billion (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2026). Rather than invest in their recovery and rebuilding, the city prioritized redevelopment that favored corporate investment and outside investors.

According to the Urban Displacement Project, the majority of South Central Los Angeles is undergoing gentrification, characterized by the ongoing displacement of low-income households as rents rise and rent-stabilized housing disappears or is demolished (Urban Displacement Project, 2026). Over the past few decades, Los Angeles has passed many laws to ensure that low-income households can weather gentrification's effects, including establishing just-cause eviction protections, rent stabilization ordinances, and tenant anti-harassment laws. But with no regulations to stabilize commercial tenants, especially as the community undergoes upgrades driven by climate investments, many small businesses in the area have been displaced or forced to close as their rents continue to rise multiple times within a year.

In recent years, the influx of climate investment dollars into historically disinvested neighborhoods in Los Angeles has reshaped the landscape, often with mixed outcomes for small business owners. While infrastructure improvements are intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote healthier environments, they have also produced unintended economic impacts. When small businesses get displaced, they don't receive relocation assistance or any other support from the government to relocate

Figure 2.6: The business corridor at 59th and Main St. in South Central Los Angeles where 11 small businesses have faced displacement (2024).



somewhere else in the community. As a result, business owners are often left with two difficult options: absorb the significant costs of relocating to a new location or permanently close their business.

This is true for small business owner Imelda Vasquez, who closed her clothing business located near the Slauson Rail to Rail project last year. Imelda was one of 11 commercial tenants who faced a 200% rent increase. When asked whether she believed climate investments were part of why her business closed, she said yes. The most salient part of this interview was when she mentioned that their rent had suddenly increased by $500 with very short notice, and the landlord's justification for this was "because they had not raised the rent in a few years." For the many small businesses operating on thin profit margins, like Imelda, both options are financially devastating.

> "Business owners are often left with two difficult options: absorb the significant costs of relocating to a new location or permanently close their business."

In South Central Los Angeles, for example, some small businesses lost street parking after bike lanes were installed as part of climate-resilient investment projects. This was true for Martin Nunez, owner of Pinky's Beauty Salon, who said, "These developments are great, and we need them in our communities, but I don't benefit as a business owner. My customers need parking, or they won't do business here." It is important to point out that these small businesses already had limited parking for customers to come and go before the bike lanes came in. Now these businesses do not even have spaces for unloading goods, much less customer parking.

This transformation has reduced the customer traffic, discouraging local shoppers and often redirecting them to larger corporate retailers, which operate in large shopping plazas where they have large parking space for customers. It's clear how small businesses, without a choice and without the situation in their favor, are competing for customers with corporate entities, who come with more financial resources, including other modern methods to do business, such as online shopping and delivery services.

Additionally, small businesses face barriers accessing city resources, such as grants and contracts related to climate improvement and climate infrastructure projects. Since the bike lanes were installed, for example, LA Metro awarded its e-bike repair and e-bike share contracts to larger companies. Smaller, local bike businesses have been left out, making it harder for them to compete, stay open, or thrive. This situation highlights a critical issue in climate-resilient investments and urban policy implementation: how to balance climate change mitigation with economic sustainability. Effective city planning must ensure that climate investments not only improve environmental conditions but also take into consideration how these climate-resilient solutions might also increase displacement pressures.

Policy Context: Commercial Tenant Protections Against No-Fault Evictions

Commercial tenants in California have very limited protection against no-fault evictions. Under the Costa-Keene-Seymour Commercial Property Investment Act (CKSCP) of 1987, cities are not allowed to set commercial rent control, which means local governments are limited in their ability to regulate rent increases and interfere with lease renewals or prevent other practices that push small businesses out (Cal. Civ. Code § 1954.27, 2025). This law also makes it harder for cities to pass and enforce relocation assistance laws, which limits their ability to support small businesses that are displaced through no fault of their own. The law creates an uneven playing field, especially in the eviction court system, that favors commercial property owners over commercial tenants, making it difficult to address no-fault evictions or ridiculous rent increases.

At the same time, the State of California is advancing ambitious climate goals aimed at reducing greenhouse

gas emissions through climate investments, large-scale building retrofits, and decarbonization efforts. According to IQAir website's entry for Los Angeles, "Los Angeles air quality has dramatically improved over the last thirty years because of the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act" (n.d.). In partnership with the California Energy Commission (CEC), SAJE is supporting the development of Building Energy Efficiency Standards, which will require both residential and commercial buildings to undergo significant clean energy upgrades beginning in 2030, with broader targets extending to 2050 (n.d.). These upgrades, including electrification and efficiency improvements, are critical for addressing climate change and improving public health outcomes in historically disadvantaged communities.

In South Central Los Angeles, where pollution has long harmed the community, new building standards are being introduced by the state and the city as part of climate solutions. These policies promote energy-efficient and climate-resilient construction to help reduce emissions and improve air quality. As outlined in *Mayor Bass' Climate Action Plan for Los Angeles, the City* aims to develop and adopt new policies to achieve net-zero carbon for new buildings and reduce the carbon footprint of existing buildings by 2026… [and] make buildings carbon-free by improving efficiency, electrifying homes, and setting strong performance standards to cut energy costs, improve indoor air quality, and reduce pollution" (City of Los Angeles, 2026, p. 7).

While these climate-resilient building performance standards are important for addressing environmental harm, they can also increase property value, commercial rent, and contribute to displacement pressure, raising concerns about climate gentrification in South Central communities. Climate change mitigation efforts can also reshape neighborhoods in ways that contribute to displacement.

Public and private investments aimed at addressing pollution, affordable housing shortages, and improving infrastructure have led to new developments, including climate-resilient building structures that provide new housing and commercial spaces. Through our weekly canvassing efforts, we witnessed many new construction developments coming into South Central Los Angeles, including new housing, retail, and storage buildings. Connected

Figure 2.7: An empty building in South Central Los Angeles, from which a business was displaced, will be redeveloped into affordable housing (2025).



to these new climate-resilient construction developments, we witnessed a rise in commercial vacancies in the surrounding areas, which is evidence of climate gentrification.

The owner of Vertigo Tattoos shared in our climate gentrification survey that, in addition to the Rail to Rail project, the new housing development next to his business resulted in displacing a lot of his neighboring businesses. This has also contributed to his rent increasing several times over the past year. He mentioned that, after being more than 15 years in the community, this is making him think of closing down his business. His health is being affected by the constant harassment from his landlord enforcing rent increases. He also shared that tenants in the new housing building were using the few parking spaces in front of his business, sometimes leaving their vehicles for days or weeks and thereby affecting his ability to provide one or two parking spots for his customers. Within a half-mile radius of newer developments that come as housing projects, multiple small businesses have closed, leaving empty storefronts around the new construction projects.

> “Climate disasters can trigger economic instability and intensify displacement pressures for small businesses even in communities not directly impacted by a climate disaster.”

This pattern suggests that if new climate-resilient housing and commercial building projects don’t come with concrete commercial tenant protections against no-fault evictions, they do not 100% benefit the existing small businesses in the surrounding area. Instead, these projects contribute to the increase of displacement pressures. Building retrofits can increase operating costs for commercial property owners, which are often passed on to commercial tenants through rent increases, additional maintenance fees, or unfavorable lease terms. In some cases, tenants may also face harassment, such as pressure for commercial tenants to vacate or lease non-renewals during renovation periods. Without adequate non-fault eviction protections, these dynamics can accelerate displacement, particularly for immigrant-owned, legacy, and low-income small businesses operating on thin profit margins.

This case study finds that climate gentrification in South Central Los Angeles is in fact occurring through interconnected pathways, including the destabilizing effects of climate disasters. Following the January 2025 wildfires in Pacific Palisades and Altadena, many small businesses in South Central Los Angeles shared that they saw a drop in sales because their customers were impacted by the fires. Customers who worked in affected areas lost their jobs and income, experienced business disruptions, or had less money to spend, creating a ripple effect that hurt local community businesses. At the same time, poor air quality that spread throughout the city made it harder for people to go out and spend money, adding to the financial strain on small businesses.

Because these businesses were located miles away from the fires, they often did not qualify for disaster relief resources, including financial assistance or legal help available to businesses directly affected by the fires. As local spending decreased, many faced financial strain, even while rent increase continued due to the beautification from climate investments in their neighborhood. This combination of reduced revenue, limited access to resources, and rising rent illustrates how climate disasters can trigger economic instability and intensify displacement pressures for small businesses even in communities not directly impacted by a climate disaster.

In response, SAJE is working in partnership with the Small Business Alliance for Equitable Communities Coalition (SBAEC), bringing together partners such as Public Counsel, Bet Tzedek, Inclusive Action For The City, and the Little Tokyo Service Center, to advance policy solutions that support small business stability. These efforts include proposals such as a Los Angeles County Commercial Registry, stronger lease protections, and anti-displacement policies designed to

ensure that climate investments benefit existing communities rather than displacing them.

Additionally, through its work with the CEC, SAJE is developing equity-impact metrics and community-informed frameworks to assess how mandating building performance standards may affect small businesses if they don't come with concrete commercial tenant protections. This work aims to ensure that climate policies are implemented in ways that balance environmental sustainability with economic stability and protect vulnerable commercial tenants from displacement.

Climate Gentrification Anti-Displacement Strategies and Tools

SAJE uses a range of engagement strategies and outreach tools to connect with small business owners in South Central Los Angeles. Through this work, SAJE builds strong, trust-based relationships that allow for a deeper understanding of tenants' concerns, needs, and experiences, particularly in the context of displacement pressures linked to climate gentrification. This relationship-building is what we refer to as "base building" for our commercial tenants' campaign against displacement. These efforts also help bridge communication between commercial tenants and key decision makers, including government agencies, legal advocates, and policymakers, to advance more equitable and informed policy solutions. (For more details on anti-displacement tools and strategies, see Appendix H.)

> "Relationship-building is what we refer to as "base building" for our commercial tenants' campaign against displacement."

STRATEGIES USED FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Deep canvassing brings organizers into the community to have in-depth conversations with small business owners. Organizers come prepared with eviction-prevention and small business community resources and a set of strategic questions to spark meaningful conversations. As we ask strategic questions, we actively listen for key language, which helps us identify business owners and any issues they might be facing. Finding business owners or getting them to talk to us is not as easy as it sounds, but deep canvassing helps us strategize to find them and to build trust through thoughtful dialogue and active listening. We have to be strategic in identifying business owners in order to guide the conversation effectively toward sharing community resources and inviting them to more conversations in the future, including at our monthly community meetings for small business owners.

This approach also acknowledges the importance of respecting the time and daily responsibilities of small business owners. For many owners, time is money, so asking them to complete surveys, participate in focus groups, participate in our business alliance meetings, or engage in conversation must be done thoughtfully, intentionally, quickly, and in ways that don't interfere with their business activities. For example, when we start a conversation with business owners, we let them know upfront that if a customer comes in or if they need to continue with other business responsibilities, they can step away and come back to our conversation. This shows that we respect their time and priorities, and it helps build trust so they feel more comfortable engaging in deeper conversations with us.

Grassroots organizing is a core strategy and guiding principle of SAJE's work in the community. By organizing community members to demand change, SAJE intentionally builds collective power to advance policies that transform the material conditions of working-class people in Los Angeles. We believe that meaningful change happens when communities come together to advocate for their shared needs and demand accountability from institutions and



Figure 2.9: SAJE organizers regularly do "deep canvassing" with small business owners.

decision makers. By organizing small business owners to push for policy change, SAJE helps community members build leadership, exercise their first amendment rights, and advocate for laws that benefit their neighborhoods and community of small businesses. Grassroots organizing also creates a sense of solidarity among business owners, allowing them to move from addressing individual struggles alone to working collectively toward broader structural change.

Coalition building is a critical component of SAJE's small business organizing work because the issues impacting commercial tenants are complex and require collaboration across multiple sectors and areas of expertise. SAJE builds partnerships with policy advocates, researchers, academic institutions, legal service providers, and community-based organizations. Coalition partners contribute expertise in areas such as policy development, legal analysis, research, and assessing the feasibility of proposed laws. SAJE is a member of the SBAEC (Small Business Alliance for Equitable Communities Coalition), and our first accomplishment together was the 2026 introduction of a study to establish a first-of-its-kind Commercial Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance in the City of Los Angeles (Peters, 2026).

SAJE brings business owners and their experiences into coalition spaces to find common ground and push for policies that benefit them. Coalition building helps sustain the work by sharing responsibilities across different organizations, which prevents burnout and brings in more perspectives. By bringing together different experiences and expertise, coalition members can better understand the challenges and develop stronger, more effective solutions for small businesses. Coalition support helps build credibility among elected officials and policy makers, demonstrating that organizations and advocates working to advance protections and safeguards for small businesses are powerful in their unity and shared commitment.

Popular education is a pedagogical approach developed in the 1960s by Paulo Freire, an educator who believed in learning about the world through dialogue and partnership with adult learners, particularly those

who were illiterate (1970/2000). The popular education model challenges the traditional teacher–student relationship by disrupting systems that often exclude community members who may not have formal degrees or educational credentials from being recognized as knowledgeable contributors. Instead of viewing expertise as something held only by professionals, academics, or people in leadership positions, this model values the lived experiences of community members as a critical source of knowledge and leadership.

Through this popular education approach, small business owners learn from one another's experiences during our monthly SBA (Small Business Alliance) meetings and become the experts of their own challenges. This model helps create a safe and inclusive space for dialogue, a space where everyone is recognized as knowledgeable and is encouraged to participate in ways that feel comfortable to them, including through storytelling. According to Freire,

> *"'It is not our role to speak to the people about our view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their actions, reflects their situation in the world." (1970/2000)*

"Small business owners learn from one another's experiences during our monthly Small Business Alliance meetings and become the experts of their own challenges."

Participants are encouraged to share, through storytelling strategies, insights about their common struggles in running their businesses, as well as to share possible solutions. In addition, small business owners take different key roles in the meetings, from facilitating team-building activities, to notetaking, recruiting new members, power-mapping, and reporting back on the policy introductions at Los Angeles City Hall public meetings.

The popular education model creates a safe space, a collaborative learning environment rooted in real-life experiences. This model makes participation more accessible because it removes the pressure and hierarchy often associated with formal education spaces. It shifts away from the idea that only a select few individuals hold knowledge, and instead opens space for people who may have never seen themselves as leaders or experts. As a result, the process fosters empowerment, self-confidence, leadership, and collective growth among participants. By centering community knowledge and shared learning, the popular education model strengthens engagement, builds leadership capacity, and supports collective action among small business owners facing displacement and economic insecurity.

Storytelling is a core organizing and community-building strategy SAJE uses to create space for people from all walks of life to share their lived experiences. Through storytelling, small business owners are able to reflect on and clearly describe in their own voices the challenges they face in their day-to-day business activities. Their personal narratives help bring a human perspective to the issues impacting small businesses in the community and provide deeper insight into what is truly at stake. By sharing their stories, members illustrate how issues such as rising rent, displacement, harassment, and economic instability affect not only their business activities but also their families, health, and financial stability.

For example, a commercial tenant near Main and 59th Street, near the Rail to Rail climate-resilient project, shared that constant harassment from her landlord, including pressure to accept a 200% rent increase, caused her extreme stress and anxiety. Over time, the pressure became so intense that her blood pressure kept going up on multiple occasions, and she ended up in the hospital and displaced. This shows how landlord harassment and rent pressure can seriously harm the health and well-being of commercial tenants.

Storytelling helps illustrate a fuller picture of the pain, emotional, financial, and social impacts of these challenges. This approach also creates an inclusive and supportive environment, where members feel safe being vulnerable and open with one another. As participants recognize shared experiences and struggles, storytelling helps build trust, solidarity, and camaraderie among small business owners. In turn, these connections strengthen collective organizing efforts and empower community members to advocate for change together.

TOOLS FOR BASE BUILDING

In-person community engagement outreach: Our main outreach tool is weekly, in-person community outreach using deep canvassing. Before we go out, we make a clear canvassing plan by choosing a target area and mapping it using Google Maps. We determine outreach goals, prepare a canvassing script, and gather materials such as clipboards, sign-in sheets, and eviction prevention resources. During deep canvassing, we focus on having meaningful and intentional conversations with community members to build awareness and trust. We share information about what is happening in their community, including unfolding climate investments and the resources that come with them.

> “During deep canvassing, we focus on having meaningful and intentional conversations with community members to build awareness and trust.”

Within our canvassing goals, we prioritize engaging with people in a thoughtful and effective way to establish some level of trust and to encourage them to share their contact information, such as a phone number or a business card. Having this information allows us to follow up, stay connected, and continue inviting them to access available resources for small businesses and to invite them to participate in our business alliance meetings. Typically, these weekly canvassing efforts are carried out by two SAJE community organizers and are at times supported by SAJE interns.

Phone-banking outreach parties: Once we establish a personal connection with business owners through in-person canvassing and meet our daily goal of collecting seven to 10 contacts per organizer, we add their information to our Commercial Tenant Contact Database (CTDB). The CTDB includes the contact information, name of the business, and notes gathered from conversations with the business owners. Keeping track of notes helps us better understand their needs and follow up with available resources in a more intentional way. We then use this database to organize phone-banking efforts every other week to reconnect with commercial tenants for a second or third time. This allows us to continue to build trust and have deeper conversations about their experiences and needs.

During these calls, we identify whether a particular business owner needs support accessing or applying for small business resources. If they do not need immediate assistance, and we identified that they need to be empowered or have leadership potential, we invite them to join our SBA meetings. We encourage participation by sharing that staying connected, learning from one another, and working collectively as a community can help small business owners as a whole to identify solutions to the challenges they are facing.

One-on-one house visits: Once we’ve identified some type of leadership potential, we schedule one-on-one visits with commercial tenants to empower them to become more involved in our organizing efforts with policy advocacy. During these house visits, we have more targeted conversations about their leadership potential, the importance of their involvement, and how their experiences can help strengthen the commercial tenant campaign. These one-on-one visits are an important part of our base-building strategy because they allow us to identify emerging leaders and create opportunities for tenants to take on more direct roles within policy advocacy.

Small Business Alliance meetings: Since the summer of 2024, we have hosted monthly community meetings for small business owners as another important tool for building relationships, base building, and creating opportunities for collective action. Through a grassroots-organizing model and popular-education approach, these meetings create a safe space for business owners to have intentional conversations about the challenges they are experiencing, to identify solutions, and to discuss ways to create structural change while advocating for stronger protections for commercial tenants.

To support these conversations, we develop a meeting plan that includes community agreements, discussion topics, leadership training, and opportunities to continue engaging as a community of small business owners. We also provide space for members to participate in advocacy efforts, learn from each other's experiences, and share success stories about accessing resources available for small businesses.

"While residential tenant protections have expanded in recent years, commercial tenants continue to face limited safeguards against evictions and other forms of displacement."

Case Study Findings

There is a significant gap in policy protections for commercial tenants in the city of Los Angeles. While residential tenant protections have expanded in recent years, commercial tenants continue to face limited safeguards against evictions and other forms of displacement. In practice, commercial tenants can be displaced without fault through a 3-day eviction notice, many times tied to a rent increase request they cannot afford. With limited access to capital and legal resources, many small business owners are unable to navigate eviction proceedings on their own. A 3-day notice can quickly escalate into an unlawful detainer (UD), also known as an eviction lawsuit case, and without the financial means to hire an attorney, many tenants lose their cases simply because they do not know how to respond or file the necessary paperwork to answer or fight back the UD in eviction court.

Additionally, eviction lawsuits are often filled with complex legal jargon, creating further barriers for commercial tenants, especially for commercial tenants who don't speak English fluently or haven't had much access to a formal education. Commercial landlords know this and take advantage of this vulnerable situation commercial tenants find themselves in. As a result, commercial tenants remain largely unprotected from extreme drastic rent increases, which in many cases can be seen as rent-gouging practices. In this context, commercial landlords often take advantage of commercial tenants' vulnerability by raising rent sharply to maximize profit, especially as neighborhoods are improved and transformed through climate investments meant to address the climate crisis.

As climate-resilient investment projects began improving conditions in parts of the community, we heard from commercial tenants concerned about how landlords were taking this as an opportunity to increase rent. Many landlords began using aggressive tactics to maximize profits, including steep rent increases; refusing to make repairs, negotiate, or renew existing leases; and using intimidation so commercial tenants feel pushed to leave on their own. Through our community-engagement efforts, we heard many instances of harassment and retaliatory eviction practices when commercial tenants attempted to assert their limited rights under their leases or existing protections, such as California's SB 1103.

Tenants reported that landlords refused to accept SB 1103 recommendations and were told to either accept steep rent hikes or vacate, with little time to adjust and no opportunity for negotiation. Those who resisted or questioned the rent increases were often served 3-day eviction notices, quickly pushing them toward UD cases. While SB 1103 provides basic protections—such as longer notice periods for rent increases, extended eviction timelines, and the right

to request written lease agreements in a tenant's primary language—these safeguards are undermined in practice, as efforts to enforce them can trigger retaliation and further increase the risk of displacement.

At the same time, small businesses depend on a stable residential local customer base, and climate gentrification disrupts this balance. As residents are displaced due to rising housing rent tied to climate investments, small businesses lose their core customers, creating a compounding cycle of economic instability. The beautification that comes with climate-resilient investments can also speed up climate gentrification by attracting larger, well-resourced companies that can absorb higher rent and operate with newer business models, increasing competition and putting long-standing local small businesses at risk.

To add to the displacement risk, big corporations come to our communities with delivery-service systems and online-sales strategies that many small businesses have not yet been able to adopt, putting them at an additional disadvantage. When climate investments move forward without commercial tenant protections or without accounting for these neighborhood changes, they intensify the pressures of climate gentrification. This case study shows how climate investments and climate project developments are moving forward without the protections small, community-serving businesses need. As a result, these businesses are left increasingly vulnerable to rising rent, harassment, no-fault evictions, higher operating costs, and ongoing displacement.

Case Study Recommendations

To make sure climate investments support existing communities without pushing out small businesses, SAJE recommends centering the experiences of commercial tenants at every stage, strengthening collaboration across sectors, expanding financial and technical support, and pairing climate investments with strong non-fault eviction protections for small businesses.

1. CENTER THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMERCIAL TENANTS

To prevent climate investments triggering climate gentrification, commercial tenants, especially those most vulnerable to displacement, must be centered at every stage of planning, implementation, and post-project evaluation. Government agencies approving the climate investments should first contract community-based organizations (CBOs) to lead long-term, in-person, culturally competent community engagement. Contracted CBOs should have the capacity to engage in person with community members in ways that respect, reflect, and respond to their cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences, so people can meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them. This process should begin at least 2 years prior to project implementation and continue through at least 3 years after project completion.

Engagement efforts must support community members in understanding the broader impacts of climate investments, including rising property value, rent, cost of living, and speculative activity, while creating space for honest dialogue about both benefits and risks. Efforts should include:

- Public forums, school teach-ins for parents and students, and city-planning town halls
- In-person community engagement through deep canvassing and community meetings
- Opportunities for public comment in city council meetings
- Multilingual fact sheets and educational materials that include:
  - Definition and purpose of climate investments
  - Anticipated community benefits
  - Potential community impacts, including risks of displacement for residents and commercial tenants

Through this process, community members should actively help shape anti-displacement strategies, including designing residential and commercial tenant protections, such as anti-harassment policies, no-fault eviction protections, relocation assistance, and right to return policies. They should also be involved in determining the allocation of resources

to helping community members adapt to the transformation of their community through climate investments.

During climate-investment implementation, outreach should continue to ensure that both commercial and residential tenants are informed of project updates and resources, and are connected to know-your-rights education, eviction prevention resources, and legal support. By embedding long-term, community-led engagement and anti-displacement strategies into climate initiatives, public agencies can ensure that climate investments benefit existing residents and small businesses without displacing them.

2. STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION ACROSS SECTORS

Addressing climate gentrification requires coordinated action between government agencies, community members, CBOs, policymakers, funders, and legal-service providers as climate investments are planned and implemented.

In practice, CBOs and legal-service providers should be contracted to work alongside government agencies and funders to host early community meetings before projects begin. In these spaces, residents and small businesses learn about upcoming climate-investment projects and share concerns about displacement risks. Community legal-service providers play a key role by providing legal guidance, access to legal resources, direct representation when needed, and support for policy advocacy efforts.

Community concerns gathered through this collaboration across sectors are then integrated into policy advocacy and funding decisions, shaping project design to include strong no-fault eviction protections and ongoing resources. Throughout implementation, partners should continue meeting regularly to monitor impacts, adjust strategies, and ensure resources reach the communities most affected, so that climate investments not only improve infrastructure and reduce climate risk, but also prevent displacement of the residents and small businesses who live and work in these neighborhoods.

3. EXPAND FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Small businesses often lack the time, staffing, technology access, and language support needed to navigate complex application processes for resources. When climate investments enter communities, they should be paired with dedicated funding to contract CBOs to provide direct, in-person support to commercial tenants. This support should include:

- In-person assistance applying for grants, small business loans, and emergency relief funds
- Support with updating business permits and record-keeping
- Technical assistance and training to adapt to changing modern economic conditions

In addition to support, small businesses should also receive long-term capacity-building resources to help them grow and adapt. This includes training in digital skills, online sales platforms, social media marketing, and e-commerce tools to strengthen their economic stability in a changing market shaped in part by the beautification and modern transformation from climate investments.

All support must be culturally relevant, language-accessible, and delivered in person whenever possible to ensure it reaches the small businesses most impacted by displacement pressures and rising costs associated with climate gentrification.

4. PAIR CLIMATE INVESTMENTS WITH STRONG PROTECTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Any publicly funded climate project should include clear intentional anti-displacement strategies and dedicated funding for CBOs and legal-service providers to collaborate through grassroots organizing and to support policy advocacy and put in place needed strong tenant protections. The SBAEC coalition is a great model of great partnership success in fighting against displacement through grassroots organizing and policy advocacy.

At SAJE's SBA meetings, where commercial tenants and street vendors gather monthly, members consistently share policy solutions to the challenges they face as their neighborhoods undergo climate-related improvements and beautification. Through these

Recommendations to Ensure Climate Investments Benefit Communities Without Leading to Small Business Displacement

1 Center Community, Especially Commercial Tenants

To prevent climate gentrification in South Central Los Angeles, community members—especially commercial tenants and small business owners—must be centered at every stage of climate investments, from planning to implementation and post-project evaluation.

2 Strengthen Collaboration Across Sectors

To prevent climate gentrification, different groups—like government agencies, community organizations (CBOs), legal partners, and funders—need to work closely together. CBOs should lead community outreach and meetings so residents and small businesses can learn about projects early and share concerns. Legal partners should provide guidance and support when needed. By working together before, during, and after projects, these groups can make sure community voices shape decisions and that protections are in place to prevent displacement.

3 Expand Financial and Technical Support

This support should include:

- In-person assistance applying for grants and small business loans
- Support with business permits, renewals, and record keeping
- Help accessing emergency relief funds to prevent closures
- Technical assistance to adapt to changing economic conditions

4 Pair Climate Investments With Strong Protections for Small Businesses

Climate investments should include strong protections for small businesses to prevent displacement. This means creating clear anti-displacement policies and providing dedicated funding for legal partners and CBOs to work together to support policy advocacy and tenant protections. Success should be measured not just by environmental improvements, but by whether small businesses and residents can stay in their communities. Key solutions include fair leases, protection from harassment, relocation support for no-fault evictions, and access to full legal representation.

Figure 2.8: Climate Investment Recommendations

conversations, members have identified the following key policy priorities to strengthen protections for small businesses in South Central Los Angeles:

- Establish a commercial registry to increase transparency and accountability in rent practices, especially to document no-fault evictions
- Codify strong lease protections that ensure fair written agreements in the tenant's preferred language
- Mandate relocation assistance for "no-fault" evictions to support businesses displaced through no fault of their own
- Adopt a Commercial Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance to protect small business owners from landlord intimidation and retaliation

Additionally, cities should explore creating a right-to-counsel program for commercial tenants so that small businesses, especially those on the margins, can access full legal representation, not just basic legal advice, when facing eviction or lease disputes.

By embedding these protections into climate investments, cities can achieve a win-win outcome and will ensure that environmental progress does not come at the cost of displacing the small businesses and communities that give neighborhoods their identity and economic stability.

Conclusion

Climate gentrification is not a future concern in South Central Los Angeles; it is already happening. As neighborhoods become healthier with climate-resilient investments, they also become more desirable and more expensive. As a result, small businesses are experiencing increasing displacement pressures because they don't have protections against no-fault

evictions. When small businesses are pushed out, communities lose more than economic activity; they lose culture, community identity, job opportunities, and local economic stability.

SAJE strongly believes that climate investments are critical for improving environmental conditions and protecting communities from the growing impacts of climate change. In places like South Central Los Angeles, these investments are long overdue and necessary to address decades of pollution, health inequities, and lack of green resources. With that said, we are not against climate investments coming into our community. However, this case study illustrates that, without intentional commercial-tenant protections or funding for policy advocacy, these same investments can increase the risk of displacement for small businesses and the communities they are meant to serve.

Currently, support systems for small businesses, many of which rely primarily on resource distribution such as technical assistance, business planning, grant referrals, small business loan programs, legal advice, and know-your-rights workshops, are valuable but insufficient as standalone solutions against climate gentrification. These resources, aside from being temporary, do not guarantee concrete protection for small businesses from non-fault evictions and displacement. This is why it is critical to bring small business owners together to develop structural solutions through policy advocacy. SAJE's SBA does this through grassroots organizing and with in-person community engagement. Without strong commercial-tenant protections, existing resources fail to address the root causes of climate gentrification triggered by climate-resilient investments.

For this reason, climate solutions must go hand-in-hand with anti-displacement strategies such as ongoing in-person community engagement, in-person support for accessing resources, and funding for policy advocacy collaboration. This means investing in community-based organizations to conduct in-person outreach, education, and support, so small businesses understand upcoming climate investments and their potential impacts. It also means funding community legal providers so they can offer legal representation in cases such as non-fault evictions. In addition, climate investments should support collaboration between community-based organizations, legal partners, and city officials to advance policy advocacy led by small business owners.

With funding for policy advocacy, there can be policies in place that bring greater accountability when major climate investments come to beautify and make healthier neighborhoods like South Central Los Angeles. City leaders must not only plan for environmental improvements but also anticipate and address the rising cost of living that often follows. The protection priorities identified by SAJE SBA members help alleviate some of these pressures and move us toward a more just and equitable system to prevent climate gentrification for small businesses.

> "It is critical to bring small business owners together to develop structural solutions through policy advocacy."

Climate investments must go beyond environmental outcomes by also focusing on keeping communities in place and supporting their long-term stability. Protecting small businesses, strengthening tenant protections, and creating spaces for collective advocacy are key to a more just and equitable approach to climate resilience projects. These grassroots strategies can be used not only in South Central Los Angeles, but also in communities across the country and the world where climate investments are happening without fully considering the impacts of neighborhood change and beautification. Climate investments should include funding to partner with community-based organizations to lead grassroots organizing and in-person community engagement. These organizations should have dedicated teams of at least five full-time community organizers. The

intense work of grassroots organizing, ongoing in-person community engagement efforts, policy advocacy, and connecting small businesses to resources is too much work for just two community organizers.

Grassroots organizing and in-person community engagement offer a strong, proven model to make sure community members are centered at every stage, from planning to implementation and post-project evaluation. This approach also helps bridge communication and collaboration between public officials and small-business owners, making sure their voices are heard and included in decision-making. Public officials approving climate investments should partner with community-based organizations that have trusted relationships with residents and small business owners, as well as legal service organizations that can support policy advocacy and strengthen protections for commercial tenants.

Ultimately, the goal is not just to build greener neighborhoods to address climate change, but to make sure the people and small businesses who live and operate there are part of the climate-resilient solution, can benefit from these improvements, and are able to stay and thrive in their communities.

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APPENDIX A: *THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE GENTRIFICATION ON SMALL BUSINESSES IN SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES*

This is an academic report by a group of students in the master's of social sciences program at UCLA. It consists of their collaboration with the SAJE team in community-based research examining the concept of climate gentrification. This report also shows how climate investments and neighborhood changes can affect small businesses, the majority of whom are commercial tenants in South Central Los Angeles. The report has a focus on small businesses, displacement pressures, stability, and environmental justice.

APPENDIX B: SAJE SMALL BUSINESS ALLIANCE

This overview of the SAJE Small Business Alliance (SBA) describes how the SBA supports small businesses by creating a space for storytelling, organizing, and collective problem-solving using a popular education model. It also explains how the SBA grew from focus groups, surveys, and one-on-one conversations with small business owners into a trusted space where commercial tenants can address challenges such as rising rent, harassment, displacement pressures, and limited tenant protections.

APPENDIX C: SMALL BUSINESS CHALLENGES SURVEY

This report highlights findings in the 150 survey responses of challenges with small businesses. This data was collected by Assistant Director Francisco Arvizu, Program Manager Karen Ramirez, and interns.

APPENDIX D: *LOS ANGELES BUILDING DECARBONIZATION TENANT IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATIONS* (SAJE REPORT)

Examines how building decarbonization can improve public health and address climate change while also increasing housing costs and displacement risks for low-income and marginalized communities. The report highlights gaps in current tenant protections and provides policy recommendations to prevent cost burdens and displacement while making decarbonization more equitable.

APPENDIX E: *TENANTS AT THE CENTER: EQUITABLE PATH TO BUILDING DECARBONIZATION* (SAJE REPORT)

Examines how building decarbonization policies can address climate change while also increasing housing costs and displacement risks for renters, particularly Black, Brown, and low-income communities. The report reviews tenant protections in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, and offers policy recommendations for designing decarbonization efforts that protect tenants and prevent displacement.

APPENDIX F: *A RENTER'S RIGHT TO COOLING: ADDRESSING EXTREME HEAT IN RENTAL HOUSING* (SAJE REPORT)

Examines the impacts of extreme heat on low-income renters and highlights the need to treat access to cooling as a basic housing and health protection, not a luxury. The report centers renters' experiences and calls for climate and housing policies that prioritize health, safety, and equity.

APPENDIX G:
***ANTI-DISPLACEMENT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES* (SAJE REPORT)**

Describes SAJE's community engagement and outreach strategies for building trust with small business owners and understanding their experiences with climate-related displacement pressures. The report also explains how this base-building approach connects commercial tenants with government agencies, eviction prevention resources, and policy-makers to advance stronger and more equitable anti-displacement policies.

APPENDIX H:
CLIMATE GENTRIFICATION SURVEY USED IN THE UCLA *IMPACTS OF CLIMATE GENTRIFICATION ON SMALL BUSINESSES* REPORT

This survey was designed to understand how climate-related investments, particularly the Longest Mile project along Slauson, are affecting small businesses in South Central Los Angeles. The survey examines whether these investments are creating new pressures that contribute to climate gentrification and small business displacement.

Chapter 3

Building a Community-Led Resilience Hub to Counter Climate Gentrification and Prevent Small Business Displacement in San Juan, Puerto Rico

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Executive Summary

Taller Comunidad La Goyco represents a community-led model of cultural and small-business resistance to climate gentrification in the Santurce neighborhood of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Located in the Machuchal sector of Santurce along Calle Loíza, approximately 800 meters from the ocean, La Goyco occupies the former Pedro G. Goyco public school, which was reclaimed by neighborhood residents in 2015 after a protracted battle with the local government. They turned this school into a cultural and resilience center, hosting cultural events and welcoming residents without the ability to charge their phones or power their kitchens when power goes out. Among La Goyco's core anti-displacement tools is an affordable-workspace program that allows local small businesses to remain in the corridor as commercial rents climb.

Since Hurricane María in 2017, Machuchal has experienced compounding vulnerabilities that exemplify the dynamics of climate gentrification. The neighborhood has endured recurring infrastructure failures such as power shutdowns due to insufficient energy generation. This has also resulted in water shortages. Meanwhile, speculative reinvestment accelerated after María, transforming the commercial landscape through restaurants, nightclubs, and short-term rentals, all of which mainly benefit tourists. These pressures disproportionately affect low-income families, older adults, and immigrant communities, who all face heightened displacement risk.

This case study examines how La Goyco has developed and implemented comprehensive anti-displacement strategies that integrate physical resilience infrastructure, economic inclusion, cultural preservation, and policy advocacy.

Introduction

This case study examines how Taller Comunidad La Goyco has developed and implemented anti-displacement strategies in response to climate gentrification in the Machuchal sector of Santurce, Puerto Rico. It documents a community-led model that integrates physical resilience infrastructure,

Figure 3.1: Taller Comunidad La Goyco operates out of the former Pedro G. Goyco public school, which neighborhood residents reclaimed and turned it into a resilience hub in 2015. (Photo: Erika P. Rodriguez)



economic inclusion for local micro-entrepreneurs, cultural programming, and policy advocacy to protect long-time residents and small businesses from displacement pressures intensified by Hurricane María and the speculative post-disaster reinvestment that followed. These pressures fall hardest on the corridor's small businesses, whose owners must keep refrigeration, lighting, and point-of-sale systems running through repeated outages while competing for space with higher-paying short-term rentals and tourist-oriented uses.

Community-based monitoring shows how routine outages have become a fixture of daily life across the corridor (Figure 3.2). Through May 16, 2026 (the year-to-date at time of the project), residents of Calle Loíza and Machuchal have logged 69 days of water or power cuts, equal to 51% of the year's elapsed days, with water cuts on 67 of those days (49% of the year) and power cuts on 12 (9%); February 2026 alone saw water outages on 22 of its 28 days. The project draws on reports from more than 90 residents and shows the lived reality of these failures. As one neighbor put it, "It's the never-ending story, no water again" (Andresian, 2025a).

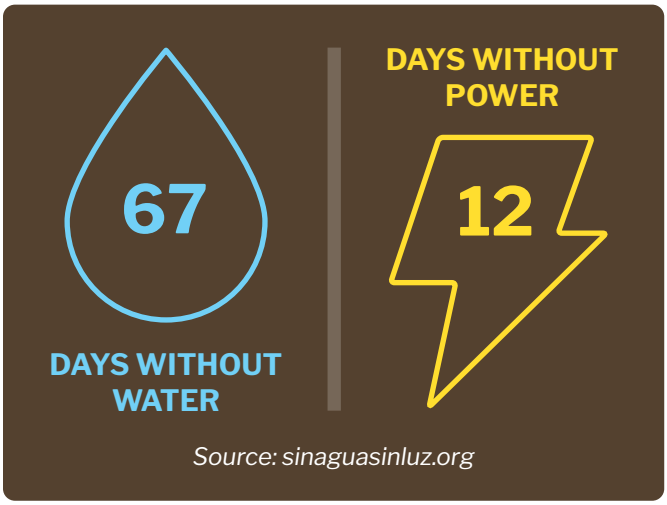
These are not new pressures: Andresian's records show water or power interruptions on 97 of 365 days in 2024 (27%) and 90 of 365 days in 2025 (25%), a pace that worsened to 32 outage days in just the first 54 days of 2026 (59%) — 187 cumulative outage days across 2024 and 2025 alone (Andresian, 2026). As one resident put it, *"Difícil vivir en este barrio y no mudarse"* ("It's hard to live in this neighborhood and not move") (Andresian, 2025a). Some interviewees perceive outages to be more frequent in lower- and moderate-income areas, though this study did not collect the systematic, cross-neighborhood data needed to confirm or quantify that pattern. Others describe outages as more common away from tourist corridors—a framing that sits uneasily with Calle Loíza's own tourist economy.

The more consistent explanation offered by interviewees, and supported by Andresian's findings, is that the corridor's electrical and water infrastructure was never fully repaired after Hurricane María and remains structurally weak, making the area vulnerable to any subsequent storm or grid stress regardless of neighborhood income or visitor traffic. At the same time, the corridor has seen rapid post-disaster reinvestment in short-term rentals: As shown in Figure 3.3, Airbnb listings in Calle Loíza and Machuchal grew from 86 in October 2015, before Hurricane María, to 824 by July 2025—a 9.6-fold increase that outpaced the islandwide growth of 7.7-fold (Andresian, 2025b).

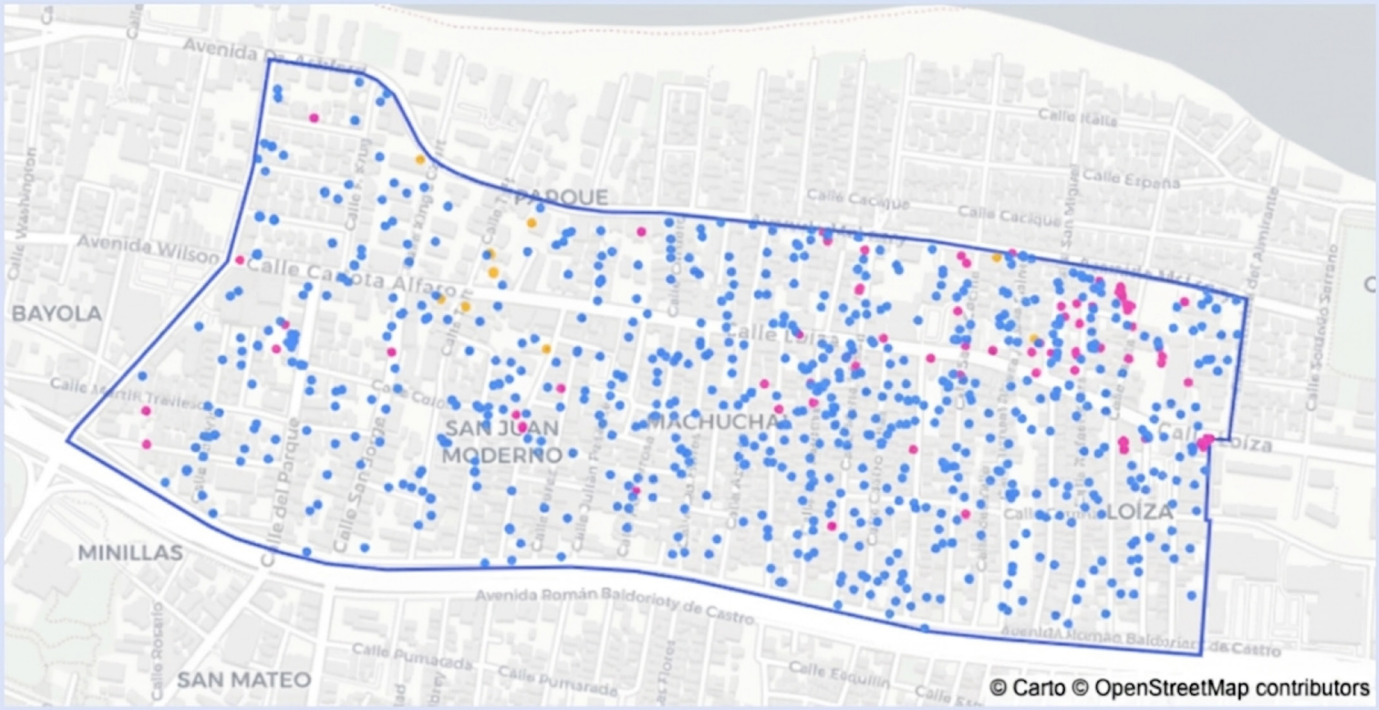
Advancing climate gentrification policy and practice in Machuchal is important because the neighborhood exemplifies the intersection of long-term disinvestment, acute climate vulnerability, and post-disaster speculation that characterizes many coastal urban neighborhoods in Puerto Rico and beyond.

La Goyco's reclamation of an abandoned public school, paired with its solar resilience infrastructure, affordable workspace program, and sustained cultural programming, shows that community control over physical space can serve as a workable foundation for anti-displacement work in a coastal urban setting. Affordable workspace, in this context, means commercial space offered to local micro-enterprises at deeply below-market rents so they can remain in a gentrifying corridor; at La Goyco, 14 such spaces rent at $500 to $1,200/month against corridor rates of roughly $3,000 to $5,000/month. La Goyco's program serves long-term residents and small business owners of the Machuchal sector as its primary audience, particularly those facing displacement pressures from rising commercial rents.

Figure 3.2: Days Without Power or Water in Machuchal Sector of Santurce, January 1 – May 16, 2026



Each point marks an Airbnb unit; for privacy, Airbnb displays it within a radius of approximately 150 meters of its actual location.



Entire accommodation · Private room · Hotel room · Shared room

824 Airbnb units ◆ **1.54** Airbnb units per **10 inhabitants** ◆ **18.5** entire accommodations per 100 housing units

Data source: Inside Airbnb (July 2025)

Figure 3.3: Airbnb Units in the Machuchal Sector

The model is also relevant well beyond Calle Loíza. Communities in Caimito and Piñonez have approached La Goyco for guidance on rescuing closed public properties, and similar climate-gentrification dynamics are unfolding in coastal neighborhoods across Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the U.S. Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Climate gentrification reshapes the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders: government entities (who lose tax base and gain new service demands), the public (which experiences displacement and the loss of community fabric), private-sector investors (who face changed market dynamics), institutional partners such as universities and funders (who must adapt their support), and community organizations themselves (which face rising demand for direct service and advocacy).

Case Study Approach

This case study was conducted by a research team from Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at Texas A&M University in partnership with Taller Comunidad La Goyco. The research team is distinct from the primary organizational entities implementing the strategies documented here. This separation allows for independent analysis while maintaining collaborative relationships with La Goyco leadership and community partners.

The research draws on 16 in-depth interviews conducted between December 2025 and January 2026, with a cross-section of stakeholders connected to La Goyco and the surrounding Calle Loíza corridor. Participants included La Goyco board members,

staff, and volunteer leadership; longtime residents and business owners along Calle Loíza; current and former political officials; and partner organizations working on land tenure, cultural programming, and anti-displacement advocacy. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English, recorded with participants' consent, and analyzed thematically against the climate-gentrification framework that organizes this report. This case study was also presented at the March 2026 Small Business Association Network site visit to Taller Comunidad La Goyco and Santurce to learn about community-led resilience and anti-displacement strategies.

Leading Organization: Taller Comunidad La Goyco

Taller Comunidad La Goyco is a community-led cultural, resilience, and small-business center in the Machuchal sector of Santurce, Puerto Rico. It operates out of the reclaimed Pedro G. Goyco public school.

The path from informal community occupation to formal property ownership required La Goyco to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, establish a board of directors, and meet the legal requirements for holding public real estate (Matos, 2022). The property was first transferred from the central government to the Municipality of San Juan under Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz before being conveyed to the community organization in 2020, a step made possible in part by Puerto Rico's Law 26 of 2017 (Ley de Cumplimiento con el Plan Fiscal [the Fiscal Plan Compliance Act]), which created mechanisms for disposing of public property and transferring unused government facilities to non-state entities.

This formalization preserved the participatory ethos that had defined the occupation since 2015 while giving La Goyco the legal standing to receive grants, sign contracts, and protect the property over the long term.

MISSION

Taller Comunidad La Goyco's mission is rooted in claiming the right to the city and operating as a grassroots-led cultural, resilience, and business center. The organization's work is organized around three main programmatic pillars (Figure 3.4):

- **Health:** Integrating physical health, mental health, and economic health as interconnected dimensions of community well-being.
- **Environment:** Including community gardens, composting, recycling, and renewable energy infrastructure.
- **Culture:** Encompassing artistic expression, cultural preservation, and community identity. The arts ventures housed here include La Casa de la Plena, founded by the late *plenero* (drummer) Tito Matos, alongside artist studios, jewelers, retailers, and printers among the tenants.

Together, these three pillars are what keep residents and local businesses anchored in Machuchal: The same space that sustains culture also incubates small enterprises and provides the resilience that enables both to endure repeated outages.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Taller Comunidad La Goyco operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization governed by a board of directors. The day-to-day operations are led by:

- Mariana Reyes, Executive Director: A long-time resident of the area who has been central to La Goyco's development since the initial occupation in 2015.
- Talía Lierca, Operations Coordinator: Serves as primary liaison with university and SBAN partners; coordinates day-to-day project logistics, tenant communications, and event production; and leads on-the-ground documentation during site visits and research activities.
- Bet Collazo Muñoz, Community Organizer: Professional social worker who joined in 2024 to support organizing work, policy advocacy, and the *fideicomiso* [land trust] development.

Eleven additional paid staff round out the day-to-day team across operations, programs, facilities, and administration. La Goyco's seven-member board of directors, chaired by Maria C. Sesto, provides governance. Appendix A lays out the resulting structure: Board of Directors at the top, Executive Director in the middle, and the three operating layers (paid staff, in-building tenant programs, and free community

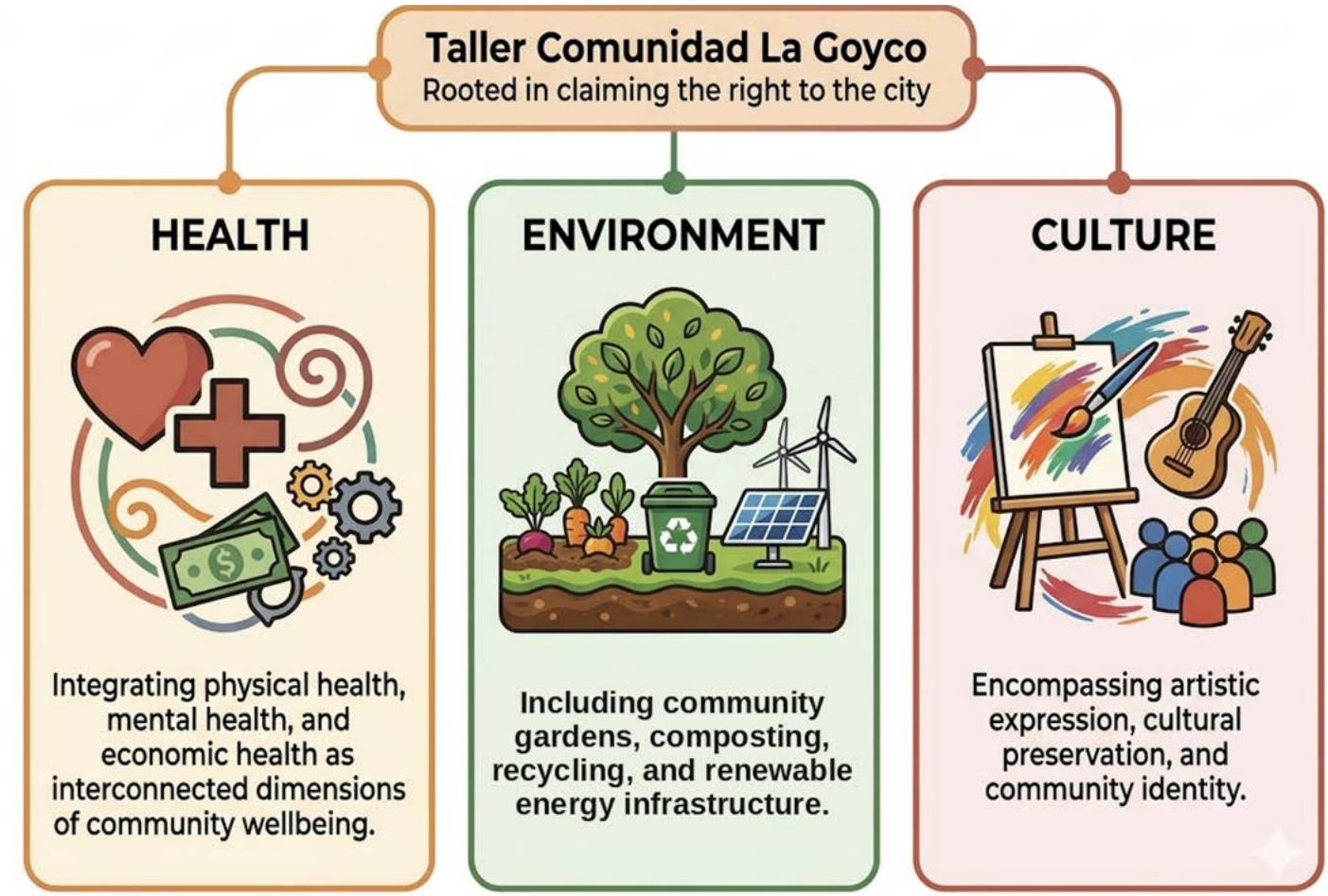


Figure 3.4: Taller Comunidad La Goyco's Three Programmatic Pillars

programs) underneath. La Goyco's Form 990 EIN 66-0910238 (ProPublica, 2024) reports total revenue of approximately $1.01M and expenses of $989K, with net assets of $3.42M; see Appendix A for the full 6-year financial summary and board roster.

The organization has evolved from a volunteer-driven community to a more formalized structure, though it maintains strong participatory governance. Much of that continuity is owed to two people in particular: Executive Director Mariana Reyes, a longtime area resident who has led the effort since the 2015 occupation; and the late plenero Tito Matos, whose early and sustained support for the project is honored in La Casa de la Plena, the arts venture housed on site and named for him (Matos, 2022). As Mariana noted, many people who volunteer with La Goyco "know how to do" the work needed and contribute their skills, whether pertaining to environmental work, community organizing, or cultural programming.

PROGRAMS

La Goyco's programs integrate physical infrastructure, economic development, cultural expression, and policy advocacy to create a comprehensive anti-displacement strategy. Figures 3.5 – 3.7 show the programmatic activity at a glance.

Neighborhood Context

Barrio Machuchal is a small sub-barrio within Santurce, the large, densely populated district at the center of the municipality of San Juan (see Figure 3.8). La Goyco sits on Calle Loíza in the heart of Machuchal, roughly 3.5 miles east of

Affordable Workspace for Small Businesses



Figure 3.5: La Goyco leases fourteen affordable workspaces to local micro-enterprises at $500–$1,200/month. In contrast, case study interviewees estimated Calle Loíza commercial rents to be approximately $3,000–$5,000/month (note these are estimates rather than a verified market survey). Pictured here: Cynthia Trigo, owner of Moda Factory, a fashion and design business housed at La Goyco. (Photo: Erika P. Rodriguez)

Public Programs and Services



Figure 3.6: Recurring free public programs for residents include the monthly Feria Comunitaria [Community Fair], Noches de Jazz [Jazz Nights], Cine Noches [Movie Nights], plena music classes, Brigada Comunitaria [Community Brigade], Sala de Lectura [Reading Room], a rotating health clinic, and a food pantry. Pictured here: The community gathers at La Goyco for Tito Matos Fest, an annual festival celebrating Puerto Rican plena music and the renowned percussionist.



Figure 3.7: The community resilience center with solar panels and a kitchen kept La Goyco operational during more than 100 load-shed events in 2024 alone. A load-shed event is an emergency shutdown of power in a particular area to prevent collapse of the entire power grid. Pictured here: SBAN members enjoy breakfast together in the La Goyco kitchen during a March 2026 site visit. (Photo: Erika P. Rodriguez)

Old San Juan and about 4 miles west of Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. The Machuchal sector of Santurce sits at the intersection of long-term disinvestment, acute climate vulnerability, and rapid post-disaster reinvestment. The two subsections that follow describe the history of neighborhood change and the current context of gentrification, drawing on both interview testimony and quantitative indicators.

HISTORY OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

Hurricane Maria in 2017 marked a major inflection point. In the aftermath of the storms, Puerto Rico experienced a period of limited investment, significant out-migration, and weakened infrastructure, including unreliable electricity and school closures. Many families left the island during this time.

At the same time, Machuchal experienced a paradoxical pattern. While it had long been a tourist area, the post-hurricane period also brought an influx of outside investment. Damaged or undervalued properties were purchased with cash and frequently converted into short-term rentals such as Airbnb units, which accelerated neighborhood change.

A central driver of this reinvestment is Act 60, Puerto Rico's 2019 tax-incentive code, which consolidated the earlier Acts 20 and 22. It grants qualifying new investor-residents near-zero capital gains and roughly 4% corporate tax rates. Eligibility turns on prior non-residency: An applicant must not have been a bona fide Puerto Rico resident during a lookback period set by the statute, which by design channels the incentive toward new arrivals rather than the island's existing population. Observers have widely



Figure 3.8: Location of Barrio Machuchal Within Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico

linked it to the cash purchase of distressed property and its conversion to short-term rentals across San Juan (Polanco, 2022).

As tourism increased and new investors arrived, the commercial landscape shifted significantly. Businesses that once served local residents were increasingly replaced by restaurants, nightlife venues, and short-term rentals. Although this activity could be framed as economic development, the benefits were uneven and primarily benefiting those with the capital to invest. Census figures from 2010 to 2024 capture this shift: Between 2010 and 2024, the sector's median home value rose about 60% in real terms, and median gross rent about 18%, even as the storefront mix turned over (see Table 3.1).

A scan of the corridor underscores the point: Within a 5 to 10 minute walk of La Goyco, roughly 40 storefronts are operating, the large majority of which are restaurants, cafés, cocktail bars, and boutiques, while businesses serving residents' daily needs have thinned to a single pharmacy and a couple of mini-markets, with no supermarket, hardware store, or traditional bakery in the immediate stretch. (The AINO commercial analysis independently counted 31 commercial points of interest within 500 miles and about 14,040 residents in that radius).

Against this backdrop, La Goyco's 14 affordable workspaces stand as a deliberate counter-current rather than a marginal add-on. A systematic before-and-after inventory of Santurce businesses—comparing the pre-pandemic and pre-María commercial mix to today's—was not available for this study; the storefront counts above reflect a point-in-time scan rather than a longitudinal dataset.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Table 3.1 shows that the area's total population held roughly steady between 2010 and 2024 (9,323 in 2010; 8,264 in 2017; and 9,004 in 2024), but the composition of that population changed in ways that are diagnostic of gentrification. The Hispanic or Latino share fell from 96.5% in 2010 to 86.1% in 2024, and the non-Hispanic share more than quadrupled from 3.5% to 13.9% over the same period. In

significant part, this shift reflects people from outside the Island moving into the area and displacing those who had lived in the neighborhood for decades. The Black population fell from 23.8% of residents in 2010 to 6.2% in 2024. Older adults remain a significant part of the neighborhood (approximately 50% of residents), and the corridor continues to host an immigrant community. Both of these groups are particularly vulnerable to displacement pressures.

Educational attainment is the single sharpest signal of neighborhood change. Among residents 25 and older, those with a bachelor's degree or higher nearly doubled from 31.5% in 2010 to 52.4% in 2024, and those with at least some college rose from 52.0% to 70.6%. This kind of educational upgrading, alongside the racial and ethnic recomposition described above, is a classic gentrification pattern in which a stable population number does not reflect the substantial influx of higher-education newcomers and simultaneous thinning of long-time residents.

As reflected in the income data discussed elsewhere in this study, the modest net recovery in real median household income between 2010 and 2024 is consistent with newcomers with higher income—many from outside the Island—offsetting losses among long-time residents.

CURRENT CONTEXT OF GENTRIFICATION

The current gentrification context in Machuchal is characterized by multiple intersecting displacement pressures that disproportionately impact long-time residents and small businesses. Census-derived indicators sharpen the picture: The immediate Machuchal and Calle Loíza catchment has approximately 9,004 residents with a median household income of $28,176 in constant 2024 dollars, and 37.6% of families fall below the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2017, 2024). The catchment's median sits well below the broader regional median of $80,208. Workforce indicators reinforce the picture: The average unemployment rate across the surrounding tracts is roughly 18.6%, with the worst tract above 43% (AINO, 2026).

Corridor-level data from Andresian (2025b) shows that the Calle Loíza and Machuchal sector contains 2.0% of San Juan's housing units but 16.6% of its entire-unit Airbnb listings, with a short-term rental

Table 3.1: Gentrification Indicators Barrio Machuchal, 2010–2024

INDICATOR	2010	2017	2024
POPULATION			
Total population	9,323	8,264	9,004
Population density (per sq. mi.)	18,217	16,148	15,429
RACE AND ETHNICITY			
Hispanic or Latino	96.5%	94.0%	86.1%
Not Hispanic or Latino	3.5%	6.0%	13.9%
White	62.3%	61.0%	26.7%
Black or African American	23.8%	13.3%	6.2%
EDUCATION (Pop. 25+)			
Some college	52.0%	58.4%	70.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	31.5%	35.8%	52.4%
INCOME (Constant 2024 Dollars)			
Median household income	$25,975	$21,005	$28,176
Families below poverty level	39.3%	51.9%	37.6%
HOUSING TENURE			
Total housing units	5,061	5,033	6,589
Occupied housing units	3,963	3,879	4,722
Vacant housing units	21.7%	22.9%	28.3%
Owner-occupied	37.8%	38.8%	45.5%
Renter-occupied	62.2%	61.2%	54.5%
HOUSING COST (Constant 2024 Dollars)			
Median home value	$338,920	$305,261	$543,487
Median gross rent (monthly)	$542	$539	$642
Median gross rent as % of household income	28.2%	34.3%	32.2%
Median owner costs as % of income (with mortgage)	33.5%	35.6%	29.7%

density of 18.5 entire-unit Airbnbs per 100 dwellings, which is 8 times the San Juan-wide rate of 2.2 and roughly 15 times the Puerto Rico average of 1.2. Hispanic Federation (2024) puts the corridor-level Airbnb count at 622, and the Center for a New Economy (2022) estimates that every 10% increase in STR density in Puerto Rico drives median rent up about 7% and home prices up about 23%.

Climate Gentrification Strategies

La Goyco's anti-displacement work is organized around five interconnected strategies: (1) reclamation and collective stewardship of public space, (2) economic inclusion through micro-enterprise support, (3) cultural programming as placemaking, (4) physical infrastructure for climate resilience, and (5) policy advocacy and network building. The section that follows details each strategy, and the Evaluation section assesses outcomes, limitations, and lessons learned.

DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES

Taller Comunidad La Goyco's anti-displacement strategies operate across multiple scales and timeframes, integrating immediate disaster response with long-term community control and cultural preservation.

> "Rather than accepting the transformation of Calle Loíza into exclusively tourist-serving businesses, La Goyco created pathways for local entrepreneurs to maintain economic presence in the neighborhood."

Strategy 1: Reclamation and Collective Stewardship of Public Space

The rescue of Pedro G. Goyco school exemplifies the strategy of converting abandoned public infrastructure into community-controlled assets. This 5-year struggle (2015–2020) resulted in formal title transfer to the community organization, establishing precedent for similar efforts across Puerto Rico. Key design elements include participatory governance, mixed-use programming (cultural, economic, environmental, health), affordable commercial rent structure ($500–$1,200/month versus market rates), and emergency resilience infrastructure. The model has inspired replication by communities in Caimito, Piñonez, and other areas experiencing battles over public properties.

Strategy 2: Economic Inclusion Through Micro-Enterprise Support

Rather than accepting the transformation of Calle Loíza into exclusively tourist-serving businesses, La Goyco created pathways for local entrepreneurs to maintain economic presence in the neighborhood. The organization provides 14 affordable rental spaces, incubator functions through workshops, and a free monthly Feria Comunitaria for artisans and micro-entrepreneurs.

As of 2026, tenants and on-site programs include Café-Tín (a coffee shop), Irreverente (a t-shirt and clothing shop), Taller La Ciénaga (an art space), Moda Factory (a fashion/design business owned by Cynthia Trigo), a Community Psychoanalytic Clinic run by Johanna Domínguez and María Victoria García, El Enjambre Colectivo (a community-organizing nonprofit), an accountant, and a jewelry shop. Several additional spaces are La Goyco's own programs rather than independent commercial tenants: La Tiendita La Goyco, a dance room, a library, a community garden (managed by Ricky Otero), and La Casa de la Plena, the plena arts venture named for the late Tito Matos.

Strategy 3: Cultural Programming as Placemaking and Community Anchoring

La Goyco positions cultural programming as an anti-displacement strategy rather than amenity. Regular programming includes monthly jazz festivals, drawing hundreds per night, film screenings, plena classes (preserving Afro-Puerto Rican traditions), yoga, theater, dance, music classes, artist studios, and a community library. Programming is designed to be accessible (often free or low-cost) and participatory rather than spectator-oriented. The logic recognizes that gentrification often commodifies culture; by maintaining community-controlled cultural production, La Goyco resists this

commodification while strengthening community identity and social ties.

Strategy 4: Physical Infrastructure for Climate Resilience

Recognizing that infrastructure failure drives displacement, La Goyco invested in energy independence and disaster preparedness. Infrastructure investments include solar panels providing backup power during grid failures, community kitchen for food preparation during emergencies, shelter space for neighbors during disasters, water access and storage, community gardens for local food production, and composting systems.

During more than 100 power outages in 2024, these systems provided critical backup. The solar infrastructure proved essential as residents faced what Anna Andresian documented as systematic infrastructure failures that disproportionately impacted those without resources for backup generators or alternative arrangements. For the resident-serving businesses housed at La Goyco, that same backup power is what allows them to keep refrigeration running, stay open, and hold on to customers during the outages that push shops without generators elsewhere in the corridor to lose stock and sales.

> “Recognizing that infrastructure failure drives displacement, La Goyco invested in energy independence and disaster preparedness.”

Strategy 5: Policy Advocacy and Network Building

While La Goyco focuses on direct service and space provision, it actively engages in policy advocacy, recognizing that displacement requires systemic responses. Policy engagement includes short-term rental regulation advocacy through Project 1557 (a Puerto Rico Senate bill that would have established municipal licensing for short-term rentals), density caps in high-impact sectors such as Calle Loíza and Machuchal, stronger enforcement against operators bypassing existing rules, a single registry for short-term-rental hosts, a requirement that operators obtain a commercial-use permit, and a cap limiting short-term rentals to no more than 30% of dwellings in residential zones.

The bill was backed by community coalitions, including Frente por el Derecho a Permanecer (Front for the Right to Remain) and signers of the Manifiesto Comunitario en torno a los alquileres a corto plazo [Community Manifesto on Short-Term Rentals], as well as merchants along Calle Loíza. After amendments during the legislative process weakened its core provisions, notably by reclassifying short-term rentals as a commercial activity only for tax purposes, the community ultimately opposed the revised version, and the original proposal was not adopted either. La Goyco’s policy work also includes participation in networks of rescued schools, membership in Frente por el Derecho a Permanecer [Front for the Right to Remain], collaboration with land trust networks *(tenencia colectiva)*, and partnerships with university researchers documenting gentrification.

Anna Andresian’s research on Airbnb proliferation provides crucial documentation for policy advocacy. Andresian’s (2025b) finding that “more than half of the Airbnb units in the Machuchal/Academia sector are managed by hosts with 5 or more units” challenges narratives that short-term rentals are primarily mom-and-pop operations, demonstrating the corporate and investment nature of the sector.

La Goyco already holds the title to the cultural resilience center property where the businesses are housed (transferred in 2020) and is now developing a fideicomiso (land trust) to make that community control permanent and to protect the site from any future sale. According to Executive Director Mariana Reyes, La Goyco also plans to acquire two nearby housing units to bring into the fideicomiso, extending permanently affordable, community-controlled tenure beyond the school building itself.

EVALUATION

This section evaluates La Goyco's outcomes across short, medium, and long timeframes, then discusses the challenges and limitations that remain. The indicators in Table 3.2 come from interviews, site observation, and publicly available documents reviewed for this case study.

Challenges and Limitations

The leadership team noted that engaging local merchants was often challenging because many business owners did not view themselves as part of a broader neighborhood community. While La Goyco has been successful in protecting the tenants and programs within its own space, it cannot control the larger market forces driving the commercial transformation of Calle Loíza. Infrastructure capacity also remains a challenge. Although the site's solar energy system provides backup power during emergencies, it is not sufficient to meet the needs of the broader surrounding community.

Financial sustainability is also an ongoing challenge. The affordable-rent model means La Goyco cannot fully cover operations through tenant payments alone, and the organization depends on continued grant-seeking and fundraising. This pattern is not unique to La Goyco: Conventional bank loans to small nonprofits and micro-enterprises remain limited across Puerto Rico; and the island's community development financial institution (CDFI) sector, consisting of just six certified institutions in 2015, has grown to 86 today, the large majority of them member-owned cooperativas (New York Fed, 2024). La Goyco does not currently report a CDFI lending relationship in its available filings. In FY 2024, contributions and grants made up about 94% of revenue ($941,734) and rental income only about 6% ($64,469), so tenant rents cover only a small share of operations (ProPublica, 2024).

The third challenge in this case study is that policy advocacy has had mixed results: The short-term rental regulation effort built community-organizing capacity, but the final policy did not achieve community goals. Because of this, the community ultimately opposed the modified version of Project 1557. Scale and replicability also raise hard questions.

Table 3.2: La Goyco's Anti-Displacement Outcomes and Impacts Across Different Timeframes

SHORT-TERM (1–3 YEARS)	MEDIUM-TERM (3–7 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (7+ YEARS)
Title transfer achieved (2020), a major milestone securing community control	Some entrepreneurs transitioned from La Goyco workshops to independent storefronts (ongoing since 2017)	Property remains in community control since transfer (2020 to present, 4+ years)
Fourteen businesses maintained affordable space throughout pandemic (2020 to present)	Solar infrastructure investment proving sustainable through repeated crises	Residential land trust development under way to permanently secure community tenure
Emergency response capacity demonstrated during more than 100 power outages (2024)	Community organizing networks formalized through coalitions and policy campaigns	Replication in other Puerto Rico communities (Caimito, Piñonez, others)
Monthly programming sustained despite economic pressures	University partnerships institutionalized through student internship programs	Cultural programming preservation across multiple crisis events

Tato cautioned that replication is often pitched as a simple formula when the reality is more demanding: An attractive proposal can leave out the sustained organizing, technical capacity, and follow-through that a project like La Goyco actually required. The challenge of securing multiple properties, for example, could overwhelm community capacity without adequate resources.

The overall trajectory shows sustained community control, business retention, cultural preservation, and resilience capacity that contrasts sharply with the surrounding displacement pressures, and the model's replication by other communities suggests its strategies offer genuine pathways for anti-displacement work despite these acknowledged limitations.

Analysis: Key Factors in La Goyco's Success

The interviews with La Goyco stakeholders revealed several elements that contributed significantly to La Goyco's success:

1. LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND FORMALIZATION AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

The 5-year process from school closure (2015) to title transfer (2020) required sustained organizing. As La Goyco's Executive Director Mariana Reyes noted, the strategy included "using the space, organizing events, holding meetings, distributing leaflets, installing solar panels, creating gardens, organizing the community"—a multi-pronged approach maintaining pressure over years. Transitioning from community occupation to a formal nonprofit enabled property transfer while maintaining participatory governance. This balance avoided both pure informality (limiting legal options) and excessive bureaucratization (losing community connection).

2. STRATEGIC USE OF POST-DISASTER MOMENT

Hurricane Maria created both challenges and opportunities. The community's rapid mobilization to provide emergency services demonstrated the space's value and built legitimacy for permanent transfer.

3. INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING ADDRESSING MULTIPLE NEEDS

Rather than single-purpose use, La Goyco combined economic development, anchored by deeply below-market workspace rents, cultural programming, environmental sustainability, and health services. This integration made the space essential to diverse community members.

4. COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Relationships with El Enjambre Colectivo, university students, the Estuario, and other organizations multiplied capacity, and these ties are not incidental. El Enjambre Colectivo brought in the community organizer and the rotating University of Puerto Rico student interns who help document displacement, while the San Juan Bay Estuary Program has partnered since the early days on the environmental work, each extending what the small tenant businesses can draw on.

5. DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

By hosting student researchers and documenting impacts, La Goyco built an evidence base for policy advocacy, turning routine site documentation into data that supports both its own grant applications and the broader case that community-led anti-displacement work is replicable elsewhere.

Recommendations

Looking ahead, La Goyco's own priorities point to three concrete next steps. The first is closing the financial-sustainability gap described above by diversifying beyond grants and tenant rents, most immediately through the fideicomiso now under development, which is intended to secure long-term revenue as well as tenure. Second is documenting turnover and outcomes among its 14 tenant businesses so the affordable-workspace model can be evaluated on its own terms. Third is building the merchant-outreach relationships that leadership described as the hardest part of the work, since La Goyco's own protections stop at the edge of its property.

For groups considering replication, communities in Caimito, Piñonez, and elsewhere pursuing a similar model can draw on La Goyco's experience as a sequence rather than as a single formula. Securing title to a defensible physical space is paramount, since the 5-year reclamation process was itself the foundation for everything that followed.

Next, pairing that space with an income stream, however modest, alongside the cultural and resilience programming is important, since La Goyco's affordable-workspace tenants provide both revenue and a small-business anchor that a purely cultural project would not have. It is also important to build policy relationships and coalition ties early. Project 1557's mixed outcome (Strategy 5) shows that community organizing alone does not guarantee a policy win, though it does build capacity for the next attempt.

Taken together, La Goyco's community stewardship of place, economic inclusion, cultural programming, climate-resilience infrastructure, and policy advocacy together make up a model that is deliberately integrated rather than modular. La Goyco's own leadership is candid in acknowledging that no single piece of their approach would have been sufficient on its own. It is the combination, sustained over more than a decade, that has kept the corridor's small businesses and long-time residents in place.

Conclusion

Taller Comunidad La Goyco demonstrates that community-led action can produce a workable model of resistance to climate gentrification. By reclaiming an abandoned public school, building solidarity-based governance, providing affordable workspace to local micro-entrepreneurs, and pairing direct service with policy advocacy, La Goyco has carved out a foothold for long-time residents and small businesses in a corridor under intense speculative pressure. The case shows that physical-space control, economic inclusion, cultural programming, climate resilience infrastructure, and coalition-based advocacy are most effective when pursued together rather than in isolation.

Limits remain in financial sustainability, in the scale of the infrastructure the organization can support, and in how far a single building can blunt corridor-wide displacement. But the underlying principles, community ownership of land, integration across sectors, long-term commitment, and linking demonstration projects with policy change, travel well. For other coastal communities navigating climate vulnerability and post-disaster speculation, La Goyco offers both a roadmap and a reminder that anti-displacement work is fundamentally an exercise in community self-determination.

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APPENDIX A:
TALLER COMUNIDAD LA GOYCO FINANCIAL SUMMARY AND ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Chapter 4

How Indigenous Business and Enterprise Serve as Climate Adaptation and Resilience Infrastructure Across the United States

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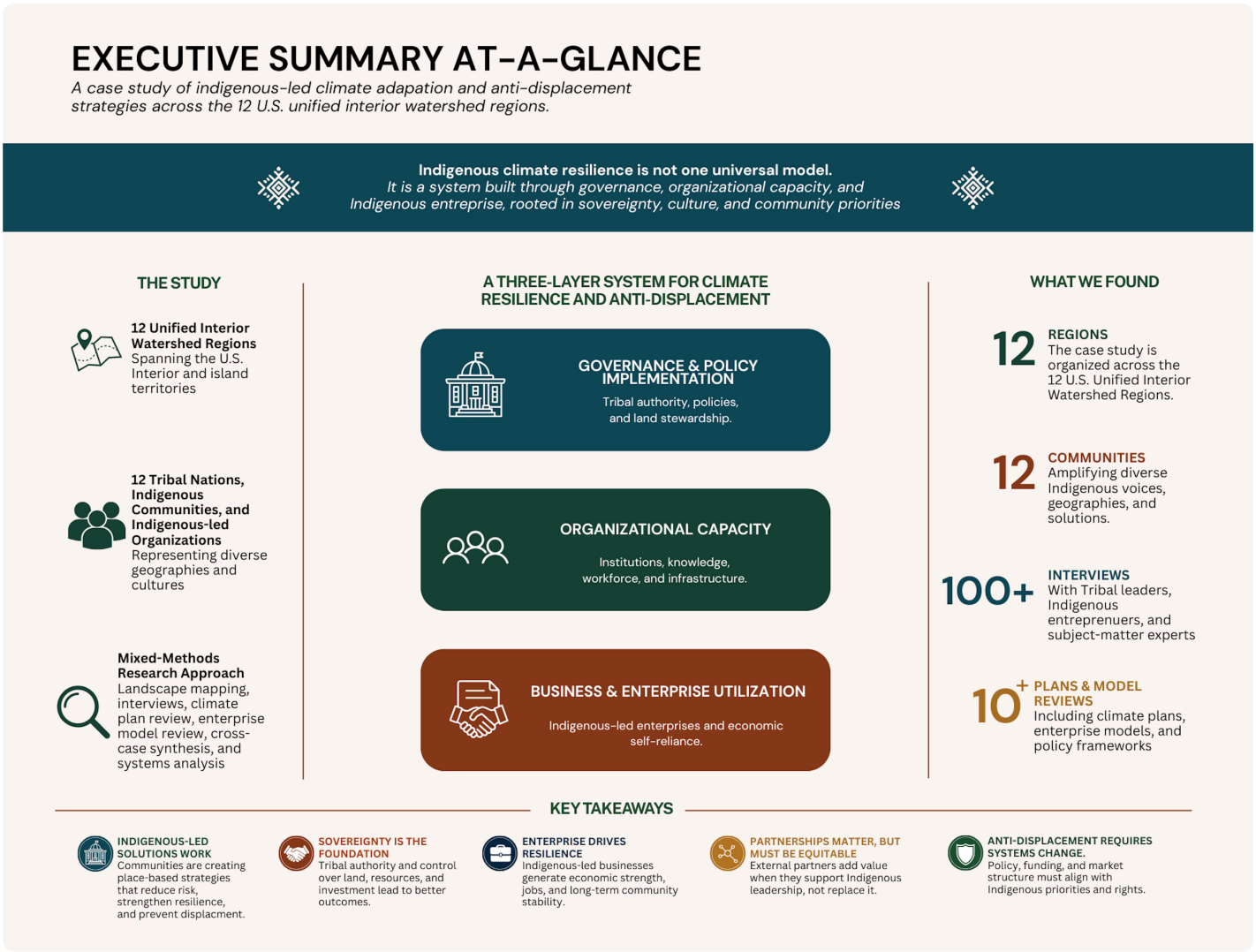
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Executive Summary

This case study examines how Tribal Nations, Indigenous-led organizations, and Indigenous enterprises are responding to climate change, climate gentrification, and displacement through interconnected systems of governance, institutional capacity, and economic resilience. Drawing on interviews, landscape analysis, policy and literature reviews, and examples across the 12 Unified Interior Regions of the United States and its territories, the research explores how Indigenous communities are building resilience in ways that extend beyond conventional climate adaptation.

Rather than identifying a singular or universally replicable model, the research found that Indigenous climate resilience is shaped by distinct political, cultural, geographic, and economic realities while consistently operating across three mutually reinforcing dimensions: governance and policy implementation, organizational capacity, and business and enterprise utilization. This case study places particular emphasis on the third dimension, demonstrating how Indigenous-owned businesses, Tribal enterprises, stewardship economies, community-controlled assets, and other locally rooted economic systems can function as climate resilience and anti-displacement infrastructure by generating

Figure 4.1: Case Study Executive Summary At-a-Glance



ownership, employment, revenue, technical capacity, and long-term institutional continuity.

The findings also demonstrate that Indigenous communities rarely separate climate adaptation from the broader work of sustaining community life, and that resilience is strongest when communities possess meaningful authority over planning, implementation, knowledge, assets, and economic benefits. While culturally specific Indigenous practices and sovereign authorities are not transferable, broader principles such as local ownership, coordinated institutions, diversified revenue, workforce development, community-controlled assets, and long-term reinvestment can inform rural, frontline, and other communities facing climate-related displacement.

Ultimately, climate resilience is not defined by a singular project or policy, but by interconnected systems that help communities remain rooted as conditions change, with Indigenous business and enterprise playing a critical role in retaining the ownership, resources, knowledge, and institutional capacity needed to shape climate futures on their own terms.

> “Indigenous communities rarely separate climate adaptation from the broader work of sustaining community life.”

Introduction

Climate change represents a new and compounding form of displacement for Indigenous communities already shaped by generations of forced removal, land dispossession, disrupted subsistence economies, and externally imposed systems of land ownership and governance. Rising temperatures, wildfires, flooding, coastal erosion, permafrost thaw, water insecurity, and shifting ecosystems threaten not only where communities live, but also the governance systems, cultural practices, businesses, and place-based economies that sustain them. For Indigenous peoples, land is more than property or residence; it is connected to sovereignty, treaty rights, cultural identity, traditional ecological knowledge, and economic life. When access to land and natural resources is disrupted, the institutions and enterprises that support community continuity may also be displaced or weakened (Barberstock, 2024; Cote, 2023; Viswanathan, 2021).

Within this case study, climate gentrification refers to the ways climate risk and climate-related responses, including adaptation funding, conservation, infrastructure investment, renewable energy development, and disaster recovery, can reshape land use, ownership, governance, and local economies in ways that marginalize Indigenous communities and institutions. Unlike conventional understandings of gentrification centered primarily on urban housing markets and residential turnover, displacement in Indigenous contexts may also occur through land speculation, loss of resource access, exclusion from emerging markets, weakened institutional authority, or the transfer of economic benefits and climate-related assets outside the community. This broader framing asks not only whether people can remain physically in place, but who controls planning, who owns resulting assets, who receives investment and contracts, whose knowledge guides implementation, and where the resulting wealth flows.

These questions are especially important because these pressures are shaped by the interconnected institutions that support Indigenous community life. Tribal governments, enterprises, Indigenous-owned businesses, financial institutions, nonprofits, and community organizations often function together as an ecosystem of governance, service delivery, cultural preservation, capital access, and economic development. Yet climate funding and investment can enter Indigenous lands without building durable local ownership or institutional capacity, particularly when communities are positioned as stakeholders or beneficiaries rather than as governments, planners, owners, contractors, knowledge holders, and implementation authorities.

Chronic underinvestment, complex jurisdiction and land-tenure systems, limited access to capital, and

short-term or administratively burdensome funding can further constrain community-led responses. Preventing climate-driven displacement therefore requires more than physical infrastructure or environmental restoration; it also requires governance authority, organizational capacity, community-controlled economic systems, and outside institutions willing to shift resources and decision-making power toward Indigenous-led implementation.

Although this study is grounded in Indigenous communities, its broader lessons extend to rural, coastal, island, low-income, and other frontline communities facing environmental and economic transition. Tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, traditional ecological knowledge, and culturally specific practices cannot be reproduced outside the peoples and governments to whom they belong. However, principles such as community ownership, participatory decision-making, diversified revenue, local workforce development, coordinated institutions, community-controlled assets, and long-term reinvestment can inform broader approaches to climate gentrification and displacement. This case study therefore examines not only how Indigenous communities are adapting to environmental change, but how they are protecting and rebuilding the systems that allow communities to remain rooted, retain control, and shape their futures on their own terms.

Case Study Approach

The American Sustainable Business Institute (ASBI) conducted this case study through an adaptive, community-centered research process guided by Indigenous-informed methodologies and systems thinking (The University of Sydney, n.d.; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). Rather than examining a single community, the study used the 12 Unified Interior Regions as a cross-regional framework for understanding how geography, governance, economic systems, and climate pressures shape Indigenous approaches to resilience and displacement (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). The methodology evolved through listening, relationship-building, and engagement with Tribal leaders, Indigenous practitioners, entrepreneurs, and community members, recognizing that no single framework could represent the diversity of Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities.

Research drew from several complementary sources:

- **More than 100 semi-structured interviews** with Tribal leaders, Indigenous entrepreneurs, climate practitioners, and community organizers across the 12 regions, focused on climate adaptation, economic resilience, community strengths, and approaches to preventing displacement.
- **Landscape, policy, and literature analysis** examining Tribal climate adaptation efforts, Indigenous business and enterprise models, governance structures, financing mechanisms, land stewardship, and community economic-development strategies.
- **Cross-regional case examples and case snapshots** used to compare strategies across different geographic, institutional, and economic contexts while distinguishing culturally specific practices from broader principles that may inform other communities.
- **Community review and iterative validation**, where applicable, to strengthen accuracy, respect community authority over knowledge, and reduce the risk of extracting or misrepresenting Indigenous experiences.

Although many Tribal Nations have implemented impactful climate-related projects, the research ultimately expanded beyond documenting existing climate strategies and climate adaptation plans to examine how governance, organizational capacity, and business and enterprise utilization work together as systems of resilience. It also identified the importance of proactive climate adaptation planning that considers climate gentrification and positions Indigenous businesses and Tribal enterprises as part of implementation rather than as peripheral beneficiaries.

The resulting case study therefore does not prescribe a singular model but surfaces adaptable principles and pathways while maintaining the distinction between transferable lessons and practices rooted specifically in Tribal sovereignty, culture, and community authority.

Leading Organization

The American Sustainable Business Institute (ASBI), the 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the American Sustainable Business Network (ASBN), serves as the lead organization and sole author of this case study. ASBN and its member associations collectively represent more than 200,000 businesses committed to advancing a just, inclusive, and regenerative economy. Through research, education, business engagement, and narrative change, ASBI works at the intersection of climate resilience, economic justice, and local economic development, with particular attention to small businesses and communities facing disproportionate environmental and economic harm. This institutional position enables ASBI to examine climate gentrification not solely as a housing or land-use issue, but as a broader challenge involving economic continuity, cultural preservation, community governance, and the ability of residents and locally rooted enterprises to remain connected to place.

Through long-standing engagement with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities by ASBI President David Levine, which predates ASBN's formation in its current organizational structure, ASBI and the broader ASBN network have developed a sustained body of Indigenous-centered work. These efforts have spanned economic development, climate resilience, regenerative agriculture, inclusive entrepreneurship, access to capital and markets, public-private partnerships, and the strengthening of policy and political capacity, reflecting an approach that connects environmental resilience with economic self-determination and community-defined priorities.

Given the organization's known and trusted commitment to Indian Country, in 2022, this work developed into a formal memorandum of understanding between ASBN and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The agreement emerged alongside the creation of the Department's Office of Strategic Partnerships, which was established to connect Tribal Nations and organizations with philanthropic, nonprofit, business, and investor resources while supporting Tribally led priorities. Announced by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland during the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit, the MOU designated ASBN as a private-sector partner in supporting Tribally led, community-based economic development and entrepreneurship, including the development of partnership tools, investment strategies, research, and stronger relationships between Tribal Nations and the business community (American Sustainable Business Network, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2022; & American Sustainable Business Network, 2022).

The American Sustainable Business Council was founded in 2009, and ASBI was established in 2011, providing the network with a sustained record of federal, state, and local engagement on climate and energy policy, responsible finance, regenerative agriculture, small-business protection, and equitable economic development. Within this complementary structure, ASBC leads coalition-building and legislative advocacy, while ASBI advances education, research, and narrative change. Together, they have mobilized business leaders around renewable energy, environmental protection, responsible lending, access to capital, and policies that strengthen local economies. ASBI's Indigenous Partnerships & Inclusive Economy initiatives extend this work through climate-smart agriculture, procurement reform, business development, public-private partnerships, youth development, and efforts to connect Indigenous enterprises with capital and regional, national, and global markets.

The case study was led by Director of Indigenous Partnerships & Inclusive Economy Terrius Harris, with support from staff working across climate and energy, public policy, regenerative agriculture, communications, operations, and business engagement. This cross-functional capacity is reinforced by a diverse board with experience in sustainable business, responsible finance, environmental justice, nonprofit leadership, and community-based economic development.

Although ASBI retains responsibility for the research and analysis presented in this case study, its role is not to substitute for community voice or treat

Indigenous experiences as transferable without context. Rather, ASBI seeks to responsibly synthesize and elevate community-informed strategies through careful listening, relationship-building, due diligence, and respect for Indigenous governance and data sovereignty. Its research, convenings, policy recommendations, business cases, and partnerships with community development financial institutions translate those insights into actionable approaches for policymakers, funders, businesses, and practitioners seeking to strengthen climate resilience without accelerating displacement.

Geographical Context

The 12 Unified Interior Regions provide a comparative framework for examining Indigenous climate resilience across diverse ecosystems, climate conditions, and economic settings, but they should not be interpreted as boundaries of Tribal Nations or Indigenous

Figure 4.2: Location of Indigenous Communities and Organizations Featured in Case Study (Graphic: Joey Rodriguez)



homelands. Tribal territories, treaty areas, reservations, ancestral landscapes, and contemporary community networks often cross state and federal lines. Climate risks also vary significantly across regions, from coastal erosion, permafrost thaw, and changing marine systems in Alaska to wildfire, drought, and water scarcity in the West; shifting forests, fisheries, and water systems in the Great Lakes and Northeast; and hurricanes, flooding, extreme heat, and coastal change across the Southeast, Gulf Coast, and Caribbean. These changes affect not only physical infrastructure,

Figure 4.3: Indigenous Institutions as an Ecosystem for Community Resilience



but also agriculture, fishing, forestry, tourism, energy, food systems, and other place-based economies.

Regional capacity to respond is equally varied. Tribal Nations differ in land base, jurisdiction, federal recognition, governmental capacity, infrastructure, economic diversification, access to capital, and relationships with outside governments and institutions. Chronic underinvestment and complex land and financing systems can constrain adaptation even where communities possess extensive knowledge and clearly defined priorities (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). At the same time, resilience is often supported by an interconnected ecosystem of Tribal governments, Tribal enterprises, Indigenous-owned businesses, Native CDFIs and other financial institutions, nonprofits, coalitions, and community organizations that provide governance, capital, employment, services, advocacy, and implementation capacity.

Across these different settings, the central issue is not simply the presence of climate investment, but who directs it, who owns the resulting assets, who receives contracts and resources, and who benefits over time. When Indigenous institutions are excluded from planning and implementation, outside actors

Figure 4.4: Three Dimensions of Indigenous-Led Climate Resilience and Anti-Displacement Strategies (Graphic: Joey Rodriguez)



may capture opportunities that could otherwise strengthen local economies and community continuity. When Tribal governments and Indigenous institutions possess meaningful authority, climate adaptation can instead reinforce local ownership, enterprise diversification, cultural continuity, and economic self-determination. This geographic and institutional framework provides the foundation for understanding the regional examples examined throughout this case study.

Climate Gentrification Strategies

Analysis across the 12 Unified Interior Regions identified three interconnected dimensions that consistently shaped Indigenous resilience to climate-driven displacement: governance and policy implementation, organizational capacity, and business and enterprise utilization. Together, these layers shape who holds authority, whether communities have the institutional capacity to act, and whether economic benefits, ownership, and implementation remain locally controlled. While all three are essential, this section focuses primarily on business and enterprise utilization; expanded findings on governance and policy implementation and organizational capacity are included in the appendices.

> “Indigenous-owned businesses, Tribal enterprises, financial institutions, and other community-controlled economic systems emerged as forms of resilience infrastructure.”

Across the research, Indigenous-owned businesses, Tribal enterprises, financial institutions, and other community-controlled economic systems emerged not simply as beneficiaries of climate action but as forms of resilience infrastructure themselves. They can create employment, retain revenue and ownership, reduce dependence on extractive or unstable industries, support essential services, and position communities to participate directly in the climate investments reshaping their lands and economies. In this sense, economic sovereignty can function as climate adaptation by strengthening a community’s ability to influence land use, infrastructure, investment, and long-term development.

The strongest examples examined in this study did not treat enterprise development as profit generation alone. Instead, they connected economic activity to environmental stewardship, cultural continuity, workforce development, public services, and intergenerational well-being. Although the specific institutions and cultural practices described below should not be abstracted from their communities, each example offers an adaptable lesson about how economic systems can be organized to support resilience. These lessons include building community-owned pathways into emerging climate markets, translating stewardship responsibilities into employment and enterprise opportunities, using decentralized networks where large institutions are unavailable, and diversifying revenue so community services are not dependent on a single industry or funding source.

AN INDIGENOUS-CONTROLLED RENEWABLE ENERGY CERTIFICATE AND CORPORATE CLIMATE PROCUREMENT MODEL

One pathway identified through this research is the development of community-owned enterprises capable of participating directly in climate markets while retaining revenue, technical expertise, and corporate relationships within Indigenous institutions. Seneca Environmental, a wholly owned enterprise of the Seneca Nation in Unified Interior Region 3, demonstrates this model by positioning the Nation not simply as a site for renewable energy development, but as an active participant in the higher-value functions surrounding climate procurement and environmental markets. Through its placement within the Nation’s corporate structure, climate-related economic activity can contribute to broader Tribal priorities while building institutional knowledge that might otherwise remain concentrated among outside

developers, consultants, and financial intermediaries (Seneca Environmental, 2025a).

Its 2025 renewable energy certificate transaction with Pinterest provides an important proof of concept. Seneca Environmental assembled and retired a portfolio of renewable energy certificates across 15 countries where Pinterest maintained offices, marking the first transaction of its kind between a global technology company and a Tribally owned enterprise (Seneca Environmental, 2025).

The significance extends beyond the transaction itself. Participation in climate markets requires expertise in certification, procurement, contract negotiation, verification, reporting, and corporate sustainability strategy, and Seneca Environmental demonstrated that these intermediary functions can be developed within an Indigenous-controlled institution. Its broader high-impact REC framework also connects renewable energy procurement with outcomes such as biodiversity protection, pollinator-friendly stewardship, workforce development, and agrivoltaics, encouraging purchasers to consider not only the quantity of renewable energy represented, but the environmental and community value created alongside it (Seneca Environmental, n.d.).

> “The Karuk Tribe treats environmental care and economic development as interconnected rather than separate functions.”

For other communities, the lesson is not that replication must begin with a large renewable energy project. It can begin by identifying where value is being generated within the clean-energy economy, determining which functions are currently controlled externally, and building community-owned capacity to participate in those areas. An initial corporate or institutional transaction can establish credibility, expose capacity gaps, create a performance record, and provide a foundation for expanding into additional parts of the value chain. Combined with workforce and youth development, this creates an incremental pathway through which communities can move from participation in climate markets toward greater ownership of the expertise, enterprises, environmental assets, and economic benefits those markets generate.

A CLIMATE TRANSPORTATION AND INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP ECONOMY SYSTEM

Another pathway identified through this research is the creation of a local resilience economy in which climate adaptation, ecological stewardship, infrastructure planning, workforce development, and small-business support reinforce one another. The Karuk Tribe, whose homelands along the Klamath River fall within Unified Interior Region 10, demonstrates this approach by treating environmental care and economic development as interconnected rather than separate functions. Climate and natural-resource planning identify the work necessary to protect the landscape and sustain community life, while economic-development, workforce, financing, and enterprise systems help ensure that local people and institutions are equipped to carry that work forward (Karuk Tribe, n.d.; Karuk Stewardship, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Indigenous fire stewardship offers a particularly powerful example: the restoration of cultural burning strengthens ecological resilience while also supporting employment, training, contracting, environmental management, and the continuation of knowledge systems that colonial fire-suppression policies sought to restrict.

This model reframes economic development around a different starting question: not simply what outside industries can be attracted to a community, but what work is already necessary to care for the land, reduce climate risk, maintain access, and sustain community life, and how local people can be trained, financed, and compensated to perform it. Forest restoration, watershed rehabilitation, prescribed and cultural burning, native plant management, environmental monitoring, road maintenance, and emergency preparedness can all become components of a locally controlled stewardship economy when

paired with workforce programs, equipment, certifications, financing, procurement opportunities, and contracting structures.

The Karuk Tribe's Climate Transportation Adaptation Plan extends this logic by connecting wildfire, flooding, landslides, and infrastructure failure to emergency access, employment, public services, cultural practices, and daily mobility while recognizing that vulnerability is also shaped by historic underinvestment, fragmented jurisdiction, and insufficient recognition of Tribal sovereignty (Karuk Tribe, 2022). In this way, infrastructure planning becomes not only an assessment of what must be repaired or protected, but also a tool for identifying future workforce, contracting, advocacy, and investment needs.

The same approach extends to the ownership of community-serving businesses and assets. Through partnerships and financing initiatives, the Tribe has supported Tribal citizens seeking to establish, expand, or acquire local enterprises, including financing that helped a Karuk citizen purchase the Salmon River Outpost and retain an important community asset under Native ownership.

For other communities, the transferable lesson is not the replication of Karuk cultural burning or other practices outside Karuk governance and cultural authority, but the creation of systems that connect identified climate and infrastructure needs to local skills, businesses, financing, procurement, and ownership. Climate plans become more powerful when they ask not only what work needs to be done but who should be trained to do it, who should own the enterprises carrying it out, and where the resulting contracts and revenue should remain. In this model, outside climate investment strengthens rather than replaces Indigenous capacity, while the work of caring for place becomes a foundation for both ecological resilience and long-term economic continuity.

A COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED LAND HUB AND DECENTRALIZED RESILIENCE NETWORK

A third pathway identified through this research centers on community-controlled land or space as an anchor for a broader network of cultural, agricultural, mutual-aid, and entrepreneurial activity.

Taíno communities in Puerto Rico, within Unified Interior Region 2, demonstrate how resilience can be built even without a large centralized enterprise, substantial government administration, or formal recognition within dominant political systems. Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, existing pressures associated with debt austerity, migration, housing insecurity, tourism-driven redevelopment, land speculation, and outside investment intensified, while formal disaster-response systems often failed to reach communities quickly or equitably. In response, Taíno-led organizations and networks strengthened forms of infrastructure that conventional economic development and emergency management systems often overlook: land stewardship, cultural education, local food production, mutual aid, community organizing, and relationships capable of moving resources when centralized systems could not (United Confederation of Taíno People, n.d.).

> "Taíno-led organizations and networks strengthened forms of infrastructure that conventional economic development and emergency management systems often overlook."

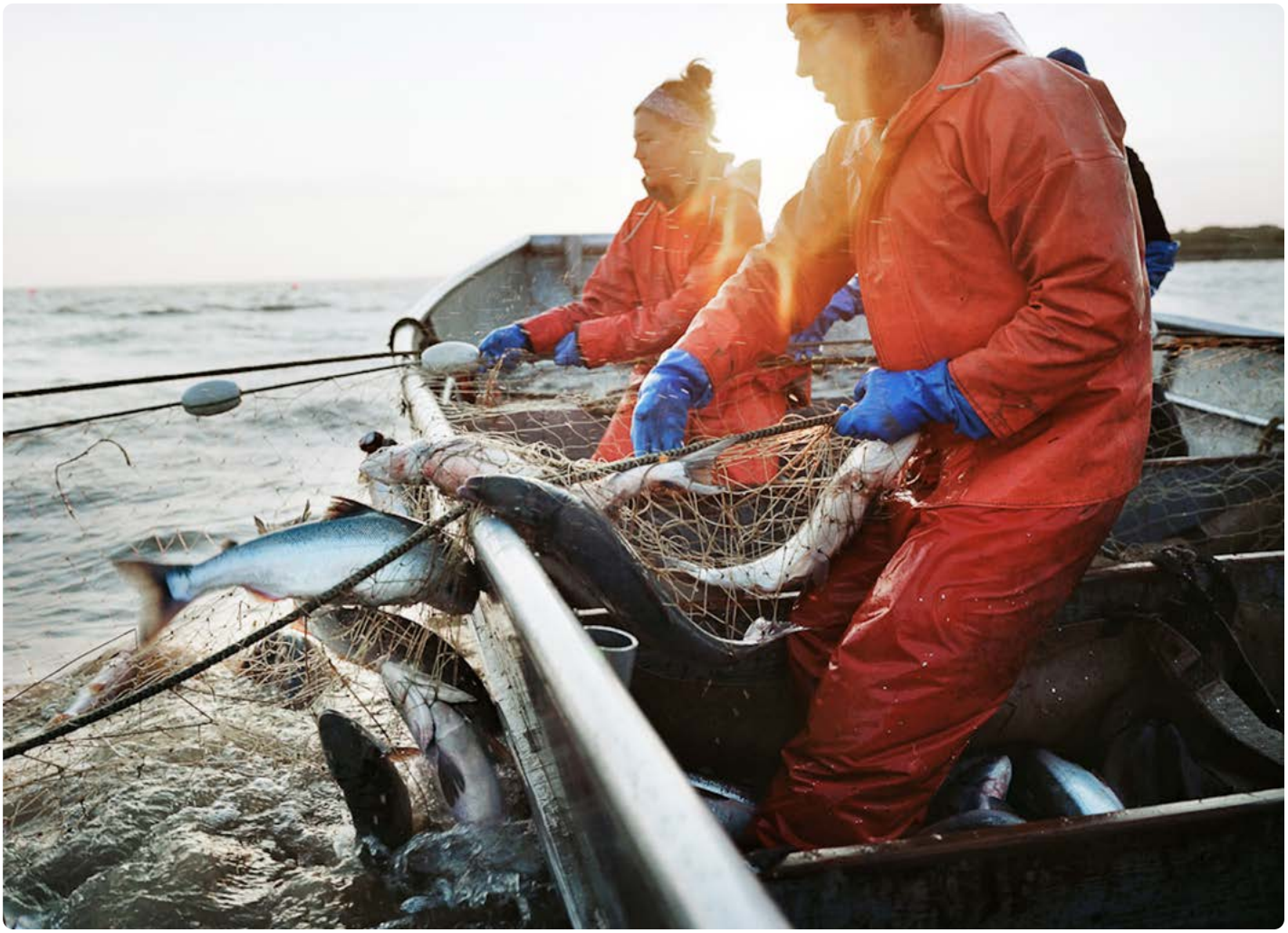
The acquisition of land for the Taíno Embassy and Community Center is especially significant because it demonstrates how control over physical space can itself function as an anti-displacement strategy (United Confederation of Taíno People, 2023). A community-controlled site can provide continuity as surrounding property markets and development patterns change while simultaneously supporting cultural programming, organizing, emergency distribution, food production, public visibility, and small-scale economic activity. Its strength lies not simply in the property itself, but in its ability to connect functions that might otherwise remain fragmented.

Traditional conuco agriculture and other agroecological practices can strengthen food security and preserve Indigenous ecological knowledge; cultural programming can support artists, educators, and entrepreneurs; and mutual-aid networks developed during emergencies can become foundations for longer-term community development. Individually, these activities may appear small, but together they create systems through which food, knowledge, labor, income, culture, and emergency resources continue circulating within the community.

For communities interested in adapting this approach, the starting point is often to identify what already exists: growers, artisans, educators, cultural practitioners, youth leaders, businesses, mutual-aid groups, land stewards, and trusted gathering spaces. The next step is to determine what shared infrastructure, whether community-controlled land, a cultural or food hub, cooperative space, emergency distribution site, market, or digital network, could better connect and sustain those assets.

The transferable lesson is not that every activity must be centralized under one institution, but that ownership, coordination, and trust can be intentionally built from the ground up. By securing spaces communities can control, strengthening local food

Figure 4.5: Facing rapidly warming oceans, declining crab populations, changing sea ice, transportation instability, and disruption to fisheries-based livelihoods, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island developed a community resilience ecosystem that includes Tribal 8(a) environmental restoration enterprises, a research center, fisheries partnerships, and more. (Photo courtesy of Businesses for Conservation and Climate Action)



and economic systems, and connecting dispersed initiatives into a broader network, communities can create the social and economic infrastructure necessary to remain rooted through disaster, redevelopment, and long-term climate change.

AN 8(A)-ANCHORED FEDERAL CONTRACTING AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ECOSYSTEM

The final pathway identified through this research centers on using the federal 8(a) Business Development Program as an entry point for converting community expertise into contracting opportunities, locally controlled revenue, and long-term institutional capacity. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI), located within Unified Interior Region 11, demonstrates how federal procurement can function as part of a broader resilience strategy rather than as a separate economic development activity. This pathway is especially significant because 8(a) eligibility is not limited to Tribal Nations; qualifying businesses may include those owned by Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, Native Hawaiian Organizations, Community Development Corporations, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

> “Federal procurement can function as part of a broader resilience strategy rather than as a separate economic development activity.”

Although certification does not guarantee federal contracts, it can help eligible enterprises build the technical systems, agency relationships, performance history, and business capacity necessary to compete for work in areas such as environmental restoration, infrastructure, energy, logistics, research support, technology, and professional services. The broader opportunity is to use an existing federal-market pathway to ensure that a greater share of public investment builds capacity within communities that have historically been excluded from those opportunities.

St. Paul Island illustrates how this approach becomes more powerful when contracting is connected to research, environmental monitoring, workforce development, infrastructure, and public services. Facing rapidly warming oceans, declining crab populations, changing sea ice, transportation instability, and disruption to fisheries-based livelihoods, the community developed an ecosystem that includes Tribal 8(a) environmental restoration enterprises, the Bering Sea Research Center, the Indigenous Sentinels Network, fisheries partnerships, education programs, and local infrastructure operations (Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, n.d.; Bering Sea Research Center, n.d.; First Nations Development Institute, 2023; Sentinels Network, n.d.).

These systems reinforce one another: Environmental monitoring identifies ecological change and emerging needs; research converts those observations into technical knowledge and planning priorities; enterprises build the workforce and operational capacity to pursue related contracts; and contracting generates employment, expertise, relationships, and revenue that can strengthen public services, infrastructure, education, and continued research. The collapse of the Bering Sea snow crab fishery further demonstrates why this diversification matters. Rather than tying community continuity to the recovery of a single climate-sensitive industry, ACSPI has expanded capacity across research, restoration, environmental monitoring, and adaptive marine management, preserving greater flexibility as ecological and economic conditions shift (Sierra Club, 2022; Oxendine 2025b).

For other communities, the transferable lesson begins with identifying both vulnerability and existing capability. A community can assess its dependence on a dominant employer, industry, natural resource, transportation route, grant program, or revenue source, then identify skills already present locally that correspond with federal purchasing needs. An eligible enterprise can use 8(a) certification as a structured entry point while developing financial controls, technical credentials, contract-management systems, agency relationships, and a record of performance.

But the designation alone is not the resilience strategy. The critical step is intentionally connecting contracts, employment, knowledge, procurement, and revenue back to broader community priorities. Workforce programs can prepare residents for future contracts, research can identify emerging service needs, and enterprise revenue can help sustain infrastructure and institutions that strengthen the community's ability to pursue future opportunities. In this way, federal contracting becomes more than a source of business revenue: It becomes a mechanism for transforming community knowledge into market capacity, public expenditures into locally retained benefits, and economic diversification into greater continuity through environmental, political, and economic change.

LESSONS ACROSS THE FOUR SYSTEMS

Across these examples, the unifying lesson is not a single enterprise model but a shared design principle: Climate resilience is stronger when communities retain meaningful control over the ownership, knowledge, employment, revenue, and decision-making connected to climate action.

> "Communities were better positioned to resist displacement when they could shape agendas, direct funding, control implementation, retain ownership, and act as governing authorities."

Although each system uses a different mechanism—from climate-market participation and stewardship economies to decentralized community networks and 8(a)-supported federal contracting—they all position enterprise as a means of strengthening the institutions that help communities remain rooted. A common implementation pattern also emerges: Identify the lands, services, and economic functions that must be protected; build the workforce, ownership structures, financing tools, and partnerships needed to sustain them; and reinvest the resulting benefits into community capacity over time.

These approaches are not interchangeable, and culturally specific practices or Tribal sovereign authorities cannot be replicated outside their appropriate contexts. What can be adapted are the underlying principles of community control, locally defined priorities, coordinated institutions, workforce development, diversified revenue, and long-term reinvestment. Business and enterprise utilization is therefore not simply about participation in climate-related markets or programs; it is about determining who owns, implements, and ultimately benefits from climate action.

Analysis and Recommendations

The central finding of this case study is that Indigenous climate resilience is strongest when approached as an interconnected system rather than as a single policy, project, or technical intervention.

Across the 12 Unified Interior Regions, no singular model could account for differences in geography, governance, political status, economic structure, institutional capacity, colonial history, and cultural priorities; instead, resilience consistently emerged through the interaction of governance and policy implementation, organizational capacity, and business and enterprise utilization. The strongest examples also demonstrated that meaningful participation requires more than consultation: Communities were better positioned to resist displacement when they could shape agendas, direct funding, control implementation, retain ownership, and act as governing authorities, planners, contractors, knowledge holders, and long-term beneficiaries.

This systems-level approach reflects the reality that Indigenous communities rarely separate climate adaptation from housing, transportation, food, health, culture, stewardship, governance, economic development, relationships, and intergenerational knowledge. Resilience was therefore strongest where communities could connect these systems while maintaining

enough flexibility to diversify revenue, coordinate institutions, and shift priorities as conditions changed. Climate resilience, in this sense, is not a fixed end state, but the continuing capacity of a community to preserve governance, relationships, essential services, economic control, cultural identity, and connection to place while adapting on its own terms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRIBAL NATIONS AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- **Ground adaptation in Nation-building and community continuity.** Connect climate planning across governance, housing, transportation, food, health, culture, infrastructure, and economic systems rather than treating projects in isolation.
- **Keep sovereignty and local ownership at the center.** Ensure communities retain authority over decision-making, data and traditional knowledge, implementation, contracts, assets, and resulting benefits.
- **Treat economic development as part of resilience.** Strengthen Indigenous-owned businesses, Tribal enterprises, and financial systems that create employment, retain revenue, and diversify local economies.
- **Build from existing strengths and create flexibility.** Connect research, youth development, partnerships, mutual aid, stewardship economies, and diversified enterprises so each reinforces the others.
- **Prioritize long-term capacity over individual projects.** Resilience depends less on the visibility of any single initiative than on whether communities retain the governance, relationships, knowledge, institutions, and economic systems needed to continue adapting on their own terms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RURAL, FRONTLINE, AND NON-INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

- **Adapt principles, not Indigenous practices.** Indigenous sovereignty, governance, cultural knowledge, and relationships to place cannot be transferred outside their appropriate contexts, but underlying principles can inform locally appropriate resilience strategies.
- **Build community-controlled systems.** Use tools such as land trusts, cooperatives, CDFIs, local food systems, small-business networks, community hubs, and other locally rooted structures to retain assets, circulate wealth, and strengthen community stability.
- **Shift power, not simply participation.** Governments, philanthropy, corporations, universities, researchers, climate organizations, and financial institutions should engage communities before priorities, budgets, research questions, and project structures are finalized.
- **Invest for long-term community benefit.** Support flexible, multi-year funding, local contracting and ownership pathways, reduced administrative barriers, and measures of success that value continuity, trust, workforce development, and institutional strength.
- **Reject extractive partnerships and change the systems that enable them.** Climate initiatives should protect consent, reciprocity, data sovereignty, transparent ownership, and long-term accountability so that knowledge, wealth, infrastructure, and decision-making remain rooted in community rather than flowing outward.

Conclusion

This case study began with a seemingly straightforward question: What strategies are Indigenous communities using to address climate gentrification and prevent displacement? Across the 12 Unified Interior Regions, no singular framework or universally replicable model emerged. Instead, the research revealed that Indigenous climate resilience is built through interconnected systems of governance, organizational capacity, economic sovereignty, cultural continuity, environmental stewardship, and relationships to place. Furthermore, resilience extends far beyond physical infrastructure; it is also found in the institutions, businesses, knowledge systems, relationships, and community networks that allow people to maintain livelihoods, exercise authority, and remain connected to place as conditions change.

The findings also broaden how climate gentrification itself should be understood. Displacement does not occur only through rising housing costs or neighborhood turnover. It can emerge through the loss of land and resource access, community-serving businesses, cultural economies, public services, local ownership, or meaningful participation in the investments reshaping a community. Across the strongest cases examined, communities were better positioned to resist these pressures when they possessed real authority over planning, capital, implementation, knowledge, assets, and resulting benefits rather than being treated only as stakeholders within systems designed by others.

The lessons of these communities should not be interpreted as an invitation to reproduce Tribal sovereignty, traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, or other systems outside the peoples and places to which they belong. Instead, what can travel are underlying principles: community ownership, participatory governance, diversified economies, workforce development, strong institutions, long-term reinvestment, and the belief that those most affected by change should possess meaningful power in shaping what comes next. This responsibility also extends beyond communities themselves. Governments, philanthropy, corporations, universities, researchers, financial institutions, and climate organizations must be willing to change systems that continue to concentrate ownership, resources, and decision-making outside the communities they intend to support.

> “Those most affected by change should possess meaningful power in shaping what comes next.”

Perhaps most importantly, this research offers a more hopeful understanding of adaptation. The communities highlighted throughout this study are not simply preparing to endure climate change. They are revitalizing stewardship practices, rebuilding local economies, strengthening cultural institutions, expanding intergenerational leadership, and restoring systems around reciprocity, sovereignty, sustainability, and collective well-being. In this sense, traditional knowledge can become a pathway toward economic liberation, not by converting knowledge into a commodity, but by restoring its role in shaping ownership, livelihoods, stewardship, and community self-determination.

Ultimately, meaningful change does not require every community to follow the same path; it requires communities and their partners to begin with the assets, relationships, knowledge, and institutions already present and intentionally strengthen them. Whether through local businesses, community-controlled land, stewardship economies, financial institutions, workforce pathways, or more equitable governance, every community can take steps toward greater ownership and continuity.

The future of climate resilience will depend not only on what is built, but on who owns it, who shapes the decisions, whose knowledge carries authority, where economic benefits flow, and whether communities retain the power to remain rooted in the places they call home. Resilience, then, is more than survival; it is the continuing ability of communities to govern, imagine, protect, rebuild, and sustain their own futures amid profound environmental, political, and economic change.

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APPENDIX A:
ASBN INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

Memorandum of Understanding Between The Office of the Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs U.S. Department of Interior and American Sustainable Business Network.

APPENDIX B:
12 UNIFIED INTERIOR REGIONS INDIVIDUAL TRIBAL CASE STUDY SUPPORTING MATERIALS

This appendix serves as a comprehensive research archive, allowing readers to explore the full range of literature, Tribal publications, government reports, organizational resources, and academic scholarship that informed both the primary report and its supplemental companion documents. Materials are organized across the study's three dimensions: a) business and enterprise utilization, b) governance and policy implementation, and c) organizational capacity.

APPENDIX C:
ADDITIONAL CLIMATE GENTRIFICATION STRATEGIES

This appendix provides expanded analysis of the governance and policy implementation and organizational capacity strategies summarized in the primary report. It includes additional Tribal examples, implementation approaches, and supporting documentation that complement the case study's focus on business and enterprise utilization.

APPENDIX D:
EXTENDED REFERENCES

This appendix contains the complete bibliography supporting the broader body of work associated with this case study. In addition to the online references cited directly within this case study, this appendix includes sources referenced throughout the companion appendices.

Conclusion

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These four case studies present a broad range of situations in which climate change impacts communities striving to thrive in the face of intense gentrification pressures. While each case study addresses unique geographic and socio-political contexts, they collectively present a broad spectrum of climate resilience models to support small businesses. Most importantly, they all come to a common conclusion: Climate change is exacerbating the gentrification forces that small business communities throughout the United States already face.

Across the four case studies, a clear consensus emerges: climate resilience cannot be reduced to technical infrastructure or environmental improvements. **Four common challenges and imperatives appear:**

1. **Avoidance of root causes is the root cause.** Mainstream climate frameworks often rely on "highly technical interventions" or "resource distribution" that fail to address some of the root causes of climate change, including economic systems that make communities vulnerable to displacement in the first place. Whether it is seawalls, energy projects, or greening initiatives, infrastructure alone is insufficient and, without safeguards, can exacerbate the very displacement it seeks to prevent.
2. **Gentrification compounded by climate change is an existing reality.** Climate gentrification is not a future threat; it is an active, ongoing process that accelerates existing patterns of inequity. It functions on top of historical legacies of exclusion, colonization, and speculative real-estate pressure.
3. **Local control is paramount.** Resilience is strongest when communities possess meaningful authority over their futures. Whether through governance, participation at negotiation tables, or grassroots organizing, communities must be primary decision-makers, not merely recipients of external policy.
4. **Resiliency is key.** All four case studies define resilience broadly. Generally, resiliency encompasses the protection of culture, local economy, affordable housing, and social identity, not just the physical environment. These case studies demonstrate communities' resiliency in their ability to remain rooted in place despite political, economic, and market pressures.

While the themes of resistance and community-led adaptation are shared, each case study emphasizes **different tactical lessons and priorities based on its specific challenges.**

THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENT NEGOTIATION FRAMEWORK

The Jorge M. Pérez Metropolitan Center case study of Little Haiti in Miami provides a granular look at the

politics of community benefits agreements (CBAs) in the context of urban development. It focuses on the strategic challenges of coalition-building and bargaining power. This case study explicitly maps the risks of different stances: Strategies may lead to tokenism, while anti-development approaches can lead to complete exclusion from negotiations. The case study highlights the need for community organizations to resolve internal disputes and reconcile competing visions before engaging with developers, emphasizing that internal unity is as critical as external bargaining leverage.

THE COMMERCIAL TENANT PROTECTION POLICY

The Strategic Actions for a Just Economy case study of South Central Los Angeles is unique in its explicit focus on the commercial displacement caused by green gentrification. The case study addresses the specific gap between environmental improvement and economic stability for small businesses. It argues that technical support is insufficient without intentional commercial tenant protections. The case study identifies a specific policy gap: city leaders plan for environmental beautification but fail to anticipate the rising costs that drive small businesses out. It calls for funding policy advocacy as a climate solution itself, ensuring that legal and structural protections are embedded directly into climate investment plans.

THE CLIMATE RESILIENCE HUB

Taller Comunidad La Goyco in Puerto Rico offers a practical model of reclamation as an anti-displacement strategy, particularly in a post-disaster context. This case study emphasizes the importance of physical space—specifically, taking control of abandoned public buildings to create a permanent community anchor with affordable retail and maker space. The case study highlights the post-disaster moment (in this case, Hurricane Maria) as both a catalyst for crisis response and an opportunity for rapid community mobilization. It provides a roadmap for combining a community space with direct services (health, cultural, economic) and policy advocacy, demonstrating that physical control of space provides the legitimacy required for effective long-term organizing.

THE SOVEREIGNTY-CENTERED MODEL

The American Sustainable Business Network's case study of tribal nations throughout the United States differentiates itself by centering Indigenous sovereignty as the core of climate resilience. It moves beyond the urban-centric view of gentrification to explore how climate pressure interacts with colonial legacies. Resilience is framed through relational, cultural, political, and ethical dimensions rather than policy alone. The case study argues that Indigenous resilience represents a broader ecosystem of governance and stewardship that challenges dominant assumptions about "adaptation" itself. The case study frames adaptation as a transformative process of economic and cultural intentional responses rather than just a defensive reaction.

The collective findings of the four case studies suggest a paradigm shift in how we approach climate resilience for communities and their small businesses. Moving forward, the most effective strategies are those that integrate three certain disparate lessons into a unified approach:

1. **Anticipatory governance:** Public officials must anticipate the economic impact of climate investments and ensure that community organizations have the institutional capacity to negotiate meaningful benefits rather than being sidelined.
2. **Structural integration:** Climate work must be inseparable from the broader work of sustaining communities—protecting housing, land tenure, and cultural identity.
3. **Community-led legitimacy:** Whether organizations and institutions are reclaiming physical space or building long-term alliances, legitimacy is earned through deep, trusted relationships that ensure communities are not just consulted but are the primary architects of their own future stability.

In conclusion, while the specific tactics—ranging from CBA negotiations to school occupations—differ based on local needs and organizational approaches, these case studies show that the ultimate measure of climate resilience is the ability of a community to remain intact, self-determined, and thriving in the face of change.