

# Vision125 FAQ

## **FAQs from 2.25.2019 Community Meeting**

*Thanks to everyone who participated in our Community Meeting on Monday, February 25, where we shared ideas for a new Harriet Tubman House at 48 Rutland Street. It was an important and lively discussion about where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. To keep our community informed, we compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions that arose from this meeting.*

### **Is the Harriet Tubman House at 566 Columbus Avenue being sold?**

The Harriet Tubman House is a vital part of our history. Our plan is to build a new Harriet Tubman House at our 48 Rutland Street property, creating a comprehensive campus for our education and enrichment programs for children and parents/caregivers. The current Harriet Tubman House is not a historic building nor does it have a historical designation.

The sale of the current Harriet Tubman House at 566 Columbus Avenue will significantly reduce our annual facility maintenance costs and allow us to create an expanded state-of-the-art facility at Rutland Street. It also gives us the capacity to increase the number of families we serve.

### **Why is USES selling the current Harriet Tubman house?**

At the conclusion of a thoughtful strategic planning process, the USES Board of Directors determined that selling the current Harriet Tubman House at 566 Columbus Avenue is critical to allow our organization to continue to fulfill its mission and vision. Our strategic planning process included careful review of our finances, programs, and real estate. We had been functioning for almost two decades with the burden of operational deficits, deteriorating and expensive facilities, and siloed, disconnected, and underfunded programs. Since Frieda Garcia's departure in 2001, the organization has had 5 executive leadership transitions over the past 18 years. This along with sustained structural deficits, two recessions (late 2001 and 2007), the quickly changing field of non-profit funding, and the gentrification of the South End contributed to a nearly depleted endowment that forced USES to answer hard questions about its future viability. vision125 is to correct the business model so that the organization can continue to serve families.

The current Harriet Tubman House is in desperate shape and requires a redevelopment that USES could not afford. Due to the state of the building and our evolving needs, it is simply not feasible to repair it. Even if we were to remain on the property, we would need to tear down the building and rebuild it; the costs to do so are prohibitive.

The funds from the sale of the property will give us the opportunity to rebuild the Harriet Tubman House at our historic 48 Rutland Street location, which will be a comprehensive campus with all of our programs in one location. The sale also allows us to build an endowment that will support our programs and our ability to continue to serve children and families for years to come.

### **Why not start a Go Fund Me to save the current Harriet Tubman House?**

The current Harriet Tubman House is in desperate shape. It requires a redevelopment that we could not afford. The cost to renovate or redevelop the building is tens of millions of dollars and is not something that USES could afford to do.

### **Is USES still offering arts programming to children?**

Yes! Children in our Early Childhood Education and club48 programs participate in art and STEAM classes. Children learn by touching, making, exploring, trying, and creating. STEAM uses the arts as a tool to introduce Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math concepts. We have developed a unique and innovative curriculum for arts/STEAM in our Early Childhood Education classrooms and currently offer STEAM through a project-based approach in club48.

Our art studio and STEAM lab will both be expanded in the new Harriet Tubman House. We will develop a full club48 curriculum as soon as funding is secured. This will also allow us to expand the program with an additional staff member. You can learn more about our club48 and STEAM programs [by watching this short video](#).

### **USES closed senior programs and said they were transitioned to another organization in the neighborhood. What happened to senior services?**

In fiscal year 2017, we made the difficult decision to no longer offer senior services. This included discontinuing a food program funded by Kit Clark, a housing home repair program that was funded by DND through the City of Boston, and health and wellness programs. These services were partially funded and were not covering direct or indirect costs. We notified our funders in March 2017 that we would not be submitting applications for renewal funding for the next grant cycle. This timeline allowed the programs to finish their grant cycle.

USES did not have control over which organization would receive the contracts for the following year. The City held an open, competitive process as it does for every funding cycle. Our understanding is that Tenants Development Corporation (TDC) was awarded the contracts to provide these services.

More information about the programs TDC offers to seniors [can be found here](#).

You can also contact the City for more information on home repairs for seniors [here](#).

### **Is there a transfer restriction on the deed at the current Harriet Tubman House at 566 Columbus Avenue?**

USES acquired 566 Columbus Ave. from the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) for \$35,000 by deed dated November 6, 1974. The deed does not contain any restrictions on the sale of 566 Columbus Avenue (the Property). Prior to the sale of the property, the BRA (now the BPDA, or Boston Planning and Development Agency) and USES entered into a Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) for the property on March 7, 1974. An LDA is an agreement that governs the transfer and use of BRA-owned property. The 566 Columbus LDA sets forth development obligations that USES was required to meet prior to and after acquiring the property. In addition, the LDA required BRA approval of any transfer of the property prior to completion of the USES Project. This restriction no longer applies because the project has been complete for several decades.

### **Did USES purchase the current location of the Harriet Tubman house for \$1?**

No. USES acquired the Harriet Tubman House from the BRA for \$35,000 by deed, dated November 6, 1974.

### **How much was in the Board-designated fund when Frieda Garcia retired as executive director?**

The fund in 1999 was \$6 million and is now just under \$1 million. This fund sustained USES operations in the interim years. The organization's financial challenges stemmed from a changing philanthropic landscape, limited resources to support a siloed programming model, and the increasing cost of maintaining aging facilities.

### **Who did USES connect with during strategic planning process?**

Over 100 people were interviewed at the beginning of our strategic planning process in 2016. We spoke to local organizational leaders from St. Stephens, IBA Boston, the South End Technology Center, local schools, housing developments, funders, staff, participants, and families.

### **How is USES going to preserve the mural at 566 Columbus Avenue?**

David Lee, an architect at Stull & Lee, the original firm that designed the current Harriet Tubman House, has joined our team to specifically advise on how we preserve the mural and other important aspects of the building.

### **Why are the community meetings held at 48 Rutland Street?**

Not only does 48 Rutland Street allow us to provide child care – a critical component of making our meetings accessible – but we also provided tours at 6:00pm for people to see our classrooms.

### **How do people learn about the community meetings?**

We promote the community meetings via fliers, social media, calendar listings, and emails. In all of our promotions, we include the start and end times, location, and other important details to ensure the community is well informed. For our most recent community meeting (February 25), we also mailed postcards to more than 4,900 South End residents.

More information about our strategic vision, including our community meeting presentations, is available at [www.uses.org/vision125](http://www.uses.org/vision125).

### **If I have questions, who should I contact?**

You can contact Emma MacDonald at 617-375-8154, [emacdonald@uses.org](mailto:emacdonald@uses.org) and/or send an email to [vision125@uses.org](mailto:vision125@uses.org). Also, visit our Vision125 web page for information and updates: [www.uses.org/vision125](http://www.uses.org/vision125).

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## **FAQs from 10.11.2018 Community Meeting**

*On October 11, 2018, United South End Settlements (USES) held an open meeting (the third in a series of meetings related to our strategic plan) to update the community that we are exploring one of the real estate options that was shared at a community meeting last year (December 2017). To this end, we are:*

- Exploring the development of a new Harriet Tubman House at our existing 48 Rutland Street location;
- Thereby seeking proposals for our property at 566 Columbus Avenue.

*Our goals are to:*

- 1) Preserve USES's mission for future generations
- 2) Serve more children and families in our community,
- 3) Honor our history and Harriet Tubman's legacy, and
- 4) Ensure USES's financial sustainability for many years to come.

We will carefully review all proposals carefully. No decisions have been made at this time.

### **Questions related to real estate:**

#### **What will happen to 566 Columbus Avenue?**

This fall, as a continuation of our Vision125 strategic planning process, we are exploring one of the real estate options we shared at a community meeting last year, which includes seeking proposals for our property at 566 Columbus Avenue.

In our Request for Proposals, we have asked responding parties to submit proposals that incorporate a mix of uses that offer significant public or community benefit. We will review all proposals carefully with this in mind. No decisions have been made at this time.

#### **What is the timeline for reviewing proposals and determining whether to sell 566 Columbus Avenue?**

We anticipate a four to five-month process of reviewing proposals. However, the timeline for next steps depends upon a variety of factors; most importantly, the quality of the proposals we receive.

We will review all proposals carefully with this in mind. No decisions have been made at this time.

#### **Will the community have a chance to give input on the proposals?**

Our Real Estate Committee, which is comprised of USES board members, community members and real estate experts, along with our Board of Directors and President and CEO, Maicharia Weir Lytle, will review all proposals carefully and determine next steps based on the goals outlined in our Vision125 strategic plan.

We remain committed to being transparent throughout our strategic planning process and will continue to keep the community updated. Our next community meeting will take place in early 2019.

For those who want to stay connected and receive updates, the best options are to go to [www.uses.org](http://www.uses.org), scroll to the bottom of the page, and sign up for our newsletter, and to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

#### **Will USES lose impact in the community if it sells 566 Columbus?**

It's important to note that 566 Columbus Avenue is not the original site of the Harriet Tubman House. As USES has evolved and reinvented itself, the Tubman house has moved before. In 1975, the original Harriet Tubman House (founded in 1904) moved from Holyoke Street to Columbus Avenue. Harriet Tubman's legacy will always be an important part of our history.

Our impact is not based on the buildings we own. Our programs for children and families, our dedicated staff and board members, and our many participants throughout the community are the backbone of USES, and our buildings are meant to support our work. Our ability to evolve over time to serve our community is one of the reasons USES has remained vital for more than 125 years.

#### **When would construction begin at 48 Rutland Street?**

We are still exploring the development of a new Harriet Tubman House at Rutland Street. The timeline depends on a number of factors including being able to finance the project.

#### **Will programs at 48 Rutland Street be closed during construction?**

No. We've developed a timeline for construction that would occur in phases to ensure that programs would remain open throughout the building process.

### **How long will it take to build the new Harriet Tubman House at 48 Rutland?**

Should we move forward, there are variables that can impact the timeline for any construction project, but we estimate that it would be roughly a year-long project from start to finish.

### **Questions related to programs:**

#### **Why has USES refocused on a new model that specifically targets children and their families?**

High inequality persists, especially among our youngest, most vulnerable residents: children. We believe families are the foundation of successful communities. As families stabilize, become resilient, and build a diverse network, parents/caregivers and their children are more likely to develop the skills they need to succeed.

We launched our renewed vision to disrupt the persistent cycle of poverty in our community by helping children and their families leverage resources to achieve economic mobility. The decisions that brought us to this point of renewal centered on mission alignment and desired impact, real estate alignment, and financial sustainability.

#### **How is the new USES model of service different today?**

We've shifted to a model in which we work with both children and their parents/caregivers – a two-generational approach to disrupting the cycle of poverty. Over time, families will have a single point of entry, or intake, where we'll help low- and moderate- income adults develop or fine-tune their goals, identify their own strengths, ensure that they have a plan for achieving those goals and support them in their journey while we provide education and enrichment programs to children. We have also been involving community members in a more meaningful way as we develop a diverse network that fosters meaningful relationships between families – building social capital.

#### **Is USES hoping to enroll a larger number of participants in programs in the future through the new program model?**

Today, our programs serve more than 300 children and families. We are working to engage at least 1,000 children and families over the next five years. Our more focused programming embraces families with a holistic range of programs that they need through every stage of their children's development—from infancy through young adulthood—to achieve economic mobility and “whole family” well-being.

#### **Why did USES close some programs and not others?**

Our limited resources could not continue to support a siloed programming model. We closed programs that did not align directly with our renewed strategic vision so that we could focus on having a greater impact on children and families.

#### **Why did USES end senior services?**

Seniors are a rich part of the fabric of this community with much to contribute. We've always cherished our seniors and are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to their lives. Last year, we transitioned our existing senior services programs to experienced organizations that can serve our seniors with programs that are similar to those we previously offered.

We are engaging seniors in a different way – as volunteers in our programs with children and adults. Seniors bring a wealth of expertise and experience, and are able to engage directly in our classrooms, and in meaningful projects in partnership with our admin and management staff.

### **Why did USES close its Adult Basic Education program that enabled participants to earn a GED?**

We've realigned our workforce readiness programming from a model centered on adult basic education to one strategically centered on career coaching, 21st century skills building, and job training. We are having a greater impact by concentrating our resources on helping participants enter the workforce more quickly, stay in the workforce, and develop next steps in a career pathway.

### **Will Camp Hale be affected by the Vision125 changes?**

Camp Hale is a critical part of USES's model. In October 2018, we broke ground on phase one of planned renovations for the camp facilities. Our goal is to expand camp activities year-round and increase the number of campers we serve each summer from roughly 200 to 300. The resilience of our campers and the benefits of the relationships formed in this diverse setting are an inspiration to our entire model and shine through in our newly defined outcomes of resources, resilience, and relationships.

### **Why is USES changing its program model?**

USES has a long history of reinventing itself. Today, we are at another critical time in our history where we have:

- Revitalized our programs to better meet the needs of our community – focusing on providing education and enrichment opportunities for children and their parents (a holistic approach to breaking the cycle of poverty);
- An opportunity to reimagine our existing property at 48 Rutland Street to support and grow our new programming model to serve more children and families; and
- An obligation to secure our financial future for many years to come.

Over these next five years, USES is doubling down on our mission and the dedication we've always had to families. Our history as a part of the settlement house movement keeps us connected to our roots, and to our core values. It's important for us to reflect on where we've been as we're focusing on an exciting future.

### **Questions about timeline and getting involved:**

#### **How many years will it take for USES to complete all of the elements of the strategic plan?**

Complex problems require complex solutions, and our plan to achieve a new vision and reach sustainability will unfold over five years (FY18-22). This includes significant changes impacting our program model, organizational structure, facilities, financial model, and performance management. Increased fundraising is necessary to unlock changes related to new positions and enhanced facilities. Our timeline could shift due to the availability of funding, the real estate market, or other factors beyond our control. To learn more, contact Nikki Stewart, Vice President of Development, at [nstewart@uses.org](mailto:nstewart@uses.org)

#### **How can the community get involved in Vision 125?**

We are incredibly grateful for the support we've received from USES families, staff members, donors, partners, community members, public officials, and others throughout our strategic planning process.

We continue to welcome your feedback on our strategic plan at [vision125@uses.org](mailto:vision125@uses.org).

For those who want to stay connected, the best options are to go to [www.uses.org](http://www.uses.org), scroll to the bottom of the page, and sign up for our newsletter, and to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

**Who can we reach out to with additional questions?**

Emma MacDonald, Director of Marketing and Communications at [emacdonald@uses.org](mailto:emacdonald@uses.org)

Regarding Programs – Dolores Ortiz, Vice President of Programs at [dortiz@uses.org](mailto:dortiz@uses.org)

For more information on our strategic plan, visit [www.uses.org/vision125](http://www.uses.org/vision125).