

Through Rapid Change, a Community Remains Together

Over the last five plus years, you may have noticed some of the huge changes happening on SE Division Street. A wave of construction brought about a number of new high rise apartment buildings, with new specialty shops and restaurants emerging as well. One of those shops, Pedal PT at 2622 SE 25th Ave b, has seen this growth first hand.

“We’ve seen really fast change in the area,” says Pedal PT owner Kevin Schmidt. “Some people are still trying to catch up to changes from five years ago.”

So what’s creating all this growth? Are *Portlandia* and Portland’s place in popular culture attributable? Certainly they may play a part. Portland has experienced an influx of new residents in the past five years, with the Census Bureau estimating that Portland is the fifteenth-fastest growing metropolitan area among the country’s fifty largest metro areas.

With so many transplants now in the area, the demand for housing has grown steadily along with the population. Area homes have increased in price dramatically, with Portland homes gaining 11.1 percent in value during 2015. Rents have similarly kept pace, increasing in price by roughly fourteen percent during 2015.

All this growth has not been without certain drawbacks. Jennifer Moody, the founder of Winding Willow Acupuncture and Wellness at 1540 SE Clinton St, has noticed that the influx and people and traffic have ended up congesting Division Street even more.

“People are now parking in the neighborhood for MAX use,” says Moody.

With parking already at a premium in the area, some customers may have been dissuaded from visiting the area simply from the frustration of trying to find somewhere to park.

There’s also been a fair amount of turnover among the businesses on SE Division Street. Part of that is tied to Division’s growing reputation as a burgeoning food community; restaurants are among the most expensive businesses to operate, and most restaurants will fail within their first few years of opening.

Put simply, “If you’re going to open up a restaurant on Division, you better bring it,” says Schmidt.

In spite of this, growth in the area has also created many positive changes for both residents and businesses. PDX Pipeline co-owner Nathalie Weinstein, who lives in the area, believes that the development of Division Street has been for the better.

“Growth in the area has given residents access to trendy shops while creating a more cultured and diverse area,” says Weinstein.

Many residents and business owners are able to both live and work in the neighborhood. The area is very walkable and features dividers on Clinton Street, making it extremely bike-friendly as well. There’s a real sense of community investment when you’re talking to business owners on SE Division Street and SE Clinton Street.

The neighborhood’s integrity shines through when you look at the collaborative ventures between area businesses over the last few years. The Clinton Street Theater has teamed up with Dot’s Café and The Lucky Horseshoe Lounge to create the *Clinton Resistance Series*, where films are shown on Monday nights free of charge and proceeds are donated to a worthy charitable cause.

As Anne Marie DiStefano, owner of The Lucky Horseshoe Lounge puts it, “The neighborhood has been galvanized by the threat of change to the community.”

This is not to say that everything about change in the neighborhood has been threatening. Alex Kurnellas, owner of the Imperial Bottle Shop and Tap Room at 3090 SE Division Street, believes that “Division is like any neighborhood. It has its share of good things and problems.”

Nevertheless, all neighborhoods face different challenges, and through it all, the SE Division and Clinton Street area has maintained its community-based identity. With more buildings set to go up in the next two years, it will be interesting to see how the neighborhood responds to continued growth

and development. With an even more diverse lineup of businesses and an increased population, SE Division Street and SE Clinton Street will continue to face some of these same issues. It will be up to residents businesses to continue to work together to help this area of Portland keep its community feel. Judging by the last five years, it appears they'll be able to do just that.