

Despite streetcar defeat, there are solid signs of progress on KC's East Side

08/26/2014 5:22 PM | Updated: 08/26/2014 5:34 PM



A new Aldi grocery store is an example of needed investments east of Troost Avenue. YAEL T. ABOUHAKAH/THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The recent defeat of the streetcar expansion on Independence Avenue and Linwood Boulevard was a lost opportunity to help spur even more redevelopment on Kansas City's East Side.

However, it's crucial to emphasize that many different positive projects already are underway in that part of the city.

The hundreds of housing units being added, new grocery stores, school reuse plans and public projects are reminders that investment in the urban core must be long-term goals for politicians, business community and residents.

Of course, simply pouring more money into long-neglected neighborhoods isn't the answer. The resources have to be targeted and used wisely. Not every proposal is going to pay off as planned. And there are still far too many vacant houses and blighted business structures on the East Side.

Still, the broader picture is impressive, yielding reasons for optimism about this part of the city, even without streetcars in the near future.

Among the notable projects:

New housing is a key to bringing in more residents to live, work and play in the central city. Some of the impressive housing initiatives are for UMKC students near 24th Street and Troost Avenue, as well as for residents in several other neighborhoods east of Troost.

New grocery stores include an Aldi at 39th Street and Prospect Avenue, while several others are planned for underserved populations of the central city.

Public revenue is being used to build the East Patrol police station near 27th and Prospect as well as a crime lab that will serve the entire city.

Larger redevelopment projects can have bigger ripple effects in nearby neighborhoods.

It's encouraging to see the new shopping area being completed at 47th and Troost. The biggest and best effort to revive southeast Kansas City will come with construction of the Cerner office project on the old Bannister Mall site. It is expected to bring in thousands of employees who could buy houses in the area and shop nearby, too.

Building up Kansas City east of Troost will take time, money and dedicated supporters. Fortunately, at this point in 2014, many of those invaluable efforts are paying off.