

Owner will build convenience store at 39th & Prospect

By Jim Davis. Kansas City Business Journal: June 8, 2001.

The co-owner of a liquor store on Prospect Avenue and 39th Street said this week that he wants to start construction this year on a convenience store that he hopes will spur other new investment in the economically deprived neighborhood on Kansas City's East Side.

"It's more of a reality than it was in the past," James Johnson said about plans to replace The A-B Store, which gets about half of its revenues from liquor and packaged goods.

Johnson said that he hasn't secured financing but that he has enlisted support from neighbors. Other backers include Kansas City Councilman Troy Nash, whose 3rd District covers Prospect. Nash said he views Johnson's investment, which could top \$2 million, as a bellwether for reversing the long-depressed area's fortunes.

"It shows what can be done to start to instill pride and a sense of hope that tomorrow can be better than today," Nash said.

Nash said he expects to seek state and federal government financing, as well as tax abatement.

Gary Sage, president of business development for the Economic Development Corp. of Kansas City, said his staff has had preliminary discussions about tax benefits, property consolidations and environmental remediation.

The site already is part of the city's revitalization strategy for the Prospect corridor. The City Council this week was expected to consider making an appropriation to extend financing for the program.

Stan Counts, the program director, said he hopes to conduct a community meeting on June 16 to assess residents' needs and tell them what help his office can provide.

The latest round of financing also would provide money to hire Kim Carlos as development director to solicit private money for the initiative. Carlos has served as Nash's senior policy adviser since his election in 1999. Previously, she worked for Emanuel Cleaver when he was Kansas City mayor.

For Johnson to start building on the northwest corner of 39th and Prospect, he said, he'll need an environmental study to check for contamination of ground that once was used for an old gas station's storage tanks.

Johnson said he anticipates tripling the annual revenues of his current store, now more than \$1 million. Liquor would continue to be sold, but Johnson said he expects new business to come from other sources.

The new store would be open 24 hours a day. Johnson hopes to add a gas station and drive-through lane, along with a police station.

Bringing police coverage would further reduce crime that Johnson said already has dropped dramatically.

These plans began to be developed about five years ago. But Johnson said he couldn't get anywhere until Nash was elected. Johnson said he wants to bring the same level of services to inner-city residents that people in new subdivisions expect. He said Nash understands this agenda.

"If they want to do something where they can change the whole neighborhood," Johnson said, "this will do it."