

"Progress Edition Essay "

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Kansas City has been fortunate enough to see massive economic development in the last few years. Downtown, in particular, is beginning to see a dramatic turn-around in the amenities it offers and the general quality of life to be found there. Revitalizing downtown is essential to the progress of Kansas City, because it can serve as the center-point for a city-wide renaissance. A stronger downtown, if managed appropriately by future mayors and city councils, will provide the resources for a healthier Kansas City.

Providing improved basic services to neighborhoods, particularly in the neighborhoods east of Troost which have been historically underserved, will be essential to building a healthier Kansas City. Our city staff works hard every day resolve citizen complaints, and they should be heartily applauded for their work. But there is a great deal more that could be done. To take one example, hundreds of vacant lots in the Third District go unmowed every year – neglected by their absentee owners, who manage to evade or delay the inspections process for long periods of time. Coupled with vacant and dangerous structures, these factors make neighborhoods less livable, especially for those long-time residents who can remember when their areas were thriving.

Unkempt lots and boarded-up houses pose a danger not just because of their lack of aesthetic value. They send a signal – often a false one – that residents don't care about their neighborhood. They can pose a health hazard, and they can encourage criminal activity. All of that is counterproductive to building a better community and actively discourages economic development.

Make no mistake about it, economic development is the key to solving many of the structural problems that the Third District faces. Despite the city's building boom and the fact that the District is currently experiencing more development than at any other time in its history, it still lags behind the rest of the city. Unemployment is far higher in the district than in the city at large. Only additional, stable, decent-paying jobs can produce the social environment that we desire. Furthermore, it must be economic development that does not only enrich the few, but seeks to advance the many.

Kansas City's challenge now is to use the gains that we have made in recent years to bring those who have been left behind along. We can take several common-sense steps in neglected neighborhoods that will have significant benefits, building a stronger Kansas City for all of us.