

Swope wants more growth on East Side

By Jim Davis. Kansas City Business Journal: November 11, 2005.

Less than a month after opening a long-awaited supermarket near Blue Parkway in Kansas City, Swope Community Builders wants to continue feeding the growth of the East Side.

The nonprofit seeks a \$71 million expansion of the Brush Creek Corridor tax increment financing district.

The proposed amendment to the six-year-old TIF plan would build about 230 housing units, 275,000 square feet of offices and 51,000 square feet of retail space. Swope CEO Kelvin Simmons said he hopes to complete the work in six to nine years.

"This has long been anticipated," Simmons said. He cited the creek's floods in 1977 and 1998 as underscoring the need to upgrade "our front door to Kansas City."

"We are taking care of this area so it never floods again," Simmons said. "We're adding jobs, we're adding development, and we're making Kansas City a beautiful place."

A Kansas City Council committee was to review Swope's proposal on Nov. 9.

The corridor's demographics establish the need for further development. The median household income of people living within a mile of Baron's Foods supermarket, which opened Oct. 28 at 4209 E. 50th Terrace, was nearly 40 percent less than the Kansas City median, according to the 2000 census. More than 90 percent of the mile-radius population was black, compared with 31 percent for Kansas City as a whole.

Swope Community Builders also seeks master development rights for the corridor. The City Council's designation would let Swope enlist development partners, sell or lease property to other developers, sell development rights and assign TIF revenue streams.

Kansas City Councilman Troy Nash said the Brush Creek Corridor TIF's demonstrated success, which includes a \$27.5 million H&R Block Inc. service center, which opened in 1999, makes him confident of Swope Community Builders' ability to marshal more resources.

"They're showing how capital is much more mobile," said Nash, chairman of the council's Planning, Zoning and Economic Development Committee, which was to review Swope's plan. "People are willing to risk dollars."

Other believers include Brush Creek Community Partners, which advocates for "a world-class cultural and research district surrounded by healthy neighborhoods."

Carol Grimaldi, the nonprofit's executive director, said community meetings and group discussions in the summer showed universal support for Swope.

Although development priorities and what ultimately will get built remain uncertain, Grimaldi said she knows what must be done first.

"We need to clear blight," she said. "That way, people can start to re-envision what can happen."

Julie Porter, program director for the Greater Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corp., said she thinks Swope Community Builders will keep building support.

"As long as you have the political will and momentum, I think it's going to happen," said Porter, whose organization finances Swope and other community development corporations.

Simmons, who became Swope's CEO in September, is well-connected, having served on the Kansas City Council, as director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development and as chairman of the Missouri Public Service Commission.

Simmons said Swope's stewardship of the Brush Creek Corridor won't be diminished by its involvement with the East Village, a proposal to redevelop 12 blocks east of City Hall. He said the projects are complementary in combating what he described as "negative attention on the East Side."

"That's undeserved," he said.