

We're helping to close gap in southern Dallas

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Two years ago, our Editorial Board began an ambitious project aimed at closing the wide economic chasm between southern and northern Dallas.

We call it "Bridging Dallas' North-South Gap," and I'm pleased to report that our work is causing change for the better.

Our monthly "10 Drops in the Bucket" project has prompted cleanup efforts throughout the southern half of the city. For instance, the Dallas Inn, that crime-ridden and rat-infested hotel, has been demolished, as has a ramshackle vacuum cleaner shop on South Hampton Road.

Our suggestions for bringing a measure of safety to the notorious Dead Man's Curve led to the Texas Department of Transportation installing a system of large warning signs and rumble strips. And we helped persuade Austin to make changes in state law to control group homes and get properties through local land banks more efficiently.

Next Sunday in a special Points section, we present the latest installment in our series on this important subject.

The newest chapter is the fruit of a year's worth of research our staff conducted with the help of Tim Bray of the Institute for Urban Policy Research at the University of Texas at Dallas. Professor Bray's team culled federal, state and local databases to quantify north-south disparity.

I predict you will be surprised and enlightened by our findings. I know I was.

We began this effort for reasons I believe you can appreciate. Southern Dallas makes up nearly 50 percent of the city's land mass but accounts for only 16 percent of property value.

Our "Gap" mission statement says: "While the moral argument for closing the gap should be sufficient motivation, simple economics also argues for action. With the north reaching build-out, southern Dallas and its undeveloped land represent untapped potential. Bolstering this area will enhance the North Texas economy, ensuring that this region has a vibrant center in Dallas - not a hollow core."

For those who believe these problems are not solvable, we can take hope from successes in cities like Boston, portions of New York City and other places where concerted community will transformed neighborhoods. It can be done.

The research focuses on five diverse neighborhoods in southern Dallas: Fair Park, Red Bird and parts of Oak Cliff, Pleasant Grove and West Dallas. Our goal is to encourage progress in those places that will radiate out through the entire area.

The Editorial Board is eager to hear from readers with questions and comments at southerndallas@dallasnews.com. And you may participate in ongoing project discussions at gapblog.dallasnews.com.

Two years into our effort, we pledge to continue to be a persistent advocate for southern Dallas.

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