

Readers' ideas on the city's divide

Dallas Morning News, The (TX) - Sunday, June 22, 2008

Southern investment benefits all

Investment in planned community development will be key to bringing Dallas together. But our investment must encourage the "coming together" that I believe the majority of us desire. Such strategic investment must include aggressive, new development of mixed-use, mixed-income housing communities and the promotion and encouragement of economic development.

The ongoing expansion of DART, coupled with rising fuel costs, provides our city a great opportunity to entice inner- and outer-ring suburbanites back to the city. Most of these inviting environments must be developed in southern Dallas, where attention is needed to renew historic neighborhoods in the process.

But how? Work off a comprehensive development plan. Be willing to make the public investment necessary to reach our goals, including subsidies, development incentives and city leadership to see such a transformation through in a manner that attracts for-profit partners. Begin a comprehensive redevelopment of Fair Park along these lines. Encourage city leaders from every council district to focus with unrelenting determination on the south, recognizing that southern sector development must become a citywide concern.

Attention to the south is the very best thing council members from other sectors can do for their districts. Investment in the south benefits everyone.

Larry James, Central Dallas Ministries, East Dallas

Start improvements at home

To bridge the gap between southern Dallas and North Dallas, southern Dallas residents are going to have to begin to take pride in its community. They need to begin with their homes and care for them first. Also, most crime is perpetrated by people within the community. Encourage kids to earn what they want in life instead of just taking it. Teach children to take pride in themselves and dress for success, instead of walking around with their pants falling off.

How can southern Dallas expect developers to want to build shopping malls, restaurants or theaters, knowing that the community is not going to maintain them? Do they want their new stores welcomed with graffiti and a few unannounced forced entries? Tell me who in their right mind will want to take a high-risk investment on a community like that. My advice is to start at home.

Anna Garcia, North Dallas

Over-invest to beat the odds

For southern Dallas to catch up with the rest of the city, it will be important to over-invest in historically underserved and underdeveloped areas. That over-investment must come by way of our time, our talents and our treasure. More of our time should be afforded for projects like this to fully understand the disparities that exist in our community.

The residents must also do our part. We must eliminate rampant littering, work with the Dallas Police Department to identify and address crime hot spots, and increase our levels of recycling. We can also be ambassadors for our city by touting the distinctive destinations that exist in our own back yards.

The University of North Texas at Dallas, the Inland International Port of Dallas and Fair Park must move from civic experiments to municipal cornerstones. We can no longer allow the Trinity River or Interstate 30 to prevent our city from reaching its potential.

Shawn Williams, southern Dallas

Neighborhoods are worth saving

To the casual observer, BonTon neighborhood looks like many other poor and neglected parts of southern Dallas.

But look closer, and you will see change - positive, life-altering changes due to partnerships between the city of Dallas, Dallas Housing Administration, Boys and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, Prestonwood and Concord Missionary Baptist churches, and H.I.S. BridgeBuilders, a faith-based ministry. Residents are attending GED, ESL, computer technology and dental laboratory technician classes leading to real employment opportunities. New homes are being built, lots cleared and landscaping completed.

Some people would ask, "Is the BonTon neighborhood worth saving?" The answer is clear: The community and its many residents are worth the investment.

Sharon Emmert, Plano

Visionaries, resources and time

The myriad issues that plague us requires a three-part solution: a vision, resources and time. For southern Dallas to surpass or, at the least, become equal to the northern part of the city, this triumvirate of remedies must function interdependently. To be given one without the other two will result in failure and frustration.

Southern Dallas needs visionaries who are unafraid to dream big dreams and who possess the fortitude to bring their plans to fruition. We need resources that will turn underserved neighborhoods and schools into sources of pride and strength, instead of symbols of neglect and despair. Last, we need time. The problems that plague us didn't occur overnight and won't be solved in one day.

It's time for the people south of the Trinity to experience the same renaissance that the rest of Dallas has been enjoying for 14 years. It's time for our city to look like one place, instead of two disproportionate halves. It's time.

Michael J. Sorrell, president, Paul Quinn College

Missing those blessings

Forty years ago, white Dallas police officers refused to go into South Dallas housing projects alone. My wife, Jackie, a young white public health nurse, went into the same projects daily teaching young moms how to feed babies and turn dresser drawers into bassinets. She said she wasn't afraid. Folks knew she was there to help.

I asked Juanita Craft, "Why do some whites fear African-Americans?" "They just don't know," she said. "If they'd come meet a few folks, they'd realize the blessings they're missing."

Two months ago, I hobbled around the Juanita Craft Recreation Center in South Dallas. I'm helping start an exercise group for Parkinson's patients. Such groups are everywhere - except South Dallas. "Physical therapists won't go there," someone said. "They're afraid it's unsafe."

Jasmine, a delightful young recreation center employee, was enthusiastic about a Parkinson's group. Brenda, a nurse practitioner in the building, said she'd help promote the group. And the folks out back at the senior center were eager to help. Others are helping find a therapist, and hopefully we'll succeed soon.

The north-south gap is closing as more folks from the north meet folks from the south, and realize what blessings they're missing.

Joe Hickman, southern Dallas

Study the reasons for disparity

If you threw 100 marbles into a circle, you would expect the marbles to land here and there, in places all around the circle. Wouldn't you be surprised to find that only 13 marbles landed in one half of the circle, while 87 landed

in the other?

The funny thing is this is happening right here in Dallas. Only 13 percent of Dallas' bachelor's degrees are south of Interstate 30 and the Trinity River. That's also true of the city's white population, and only 21 percent of the city's employers and 23 percent of the city's jobs lie in the southern sector.

A team of researchers from the region's leading universities has proposed an aggressive \$5 million research agenda to explore the social fabric producing these social facts in Dallas. This information is vital for shaping new policies that build a stronger city for all. The team is anticipating a \$1 million federal grant to spark this agenda, allowing them to investigate the effects of economic development on engagement in education.

But so much more is needed. We need to understand disparities in crime, income, jobs, health and other dimensions of quality of life. And, we must build this knowledge together. Now is the time for Dallas to rally its corporate and philanthropic generosity around this research in the way they've supported medical research and the arts. The whole, engaging, vibrant city of our children's futures depends on the steps we take today.

Timothy M. Bray, director, The J. McDonald Williams Institute, Dallas

Crack down on code enforcement

Neighborhood code enforcement on our side of the Trinity River is laughable. Code enforcement only acts on violations when reported as a complaint by a citizen. Obvious violations are largely ignored when witnessed by department personnel.

It seems logical that referrals could be made from one city department to the other, rather than require citizens to register separate reports to the Dallas Police Department and Code Compliance.

A more forceful policy against repeated warnings and a greater willingness to impose fines should be in place. Repeat offenses should be on record in a well-maintained database.

Leonard Hancock, southern Dallas

Young people have to help

To close the north-south gap, powerbrokers must realize that the success of the younger middle class determines the success of cities. We are the segment that southern Dallas is losing to the surrounding cities.

I've lived on both sides of Interstate 30 in recent years. North Dallas must also realize that you don't have to wait for permission to work with residents of southern Dallas that aren't part of the establishment.

How many people under 40 were at the table when the DISD or the 2006 city of Dallas bond packages were assembled? The answer is likely the same - zero.

In most cities, people my age are intimately involved in policy-making and development. In Dallas, we are largely shut out of the high-dollar decisions.

How can you attract the younger minority middle-class to Dallas if we aren't at the table when important decisions are being made?

Michael Davis, southern Dallas

DigitalExtra

READ MORE FROM READERS about the gap between northern and southern Dallas.

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Caption: PHOTO(S): (JIM MAHONEY/Staff Photographer) Sharron Gathrite, featured in today's Points cover essay, not only takes care of her own beautiful yard, but cleans up other people's trash throughout her southern Dallas neighborhood. CHART(S): DigitalExtra.

Edition: FIRST

Section: POINTS

Page: 3P

Column: SUNDAY LETTERS

Series: BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

Record Number: 1181057405

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