



WORKSHOP SERIES

Urban League of Greater Kansas City
1710 Paseo Blvd.
Kansas City, Mo.
Nov. 13, 2008

Welcome to Imagine KC – a discussion about the future of the built environment of the city.

People at the Imagine KC kickoff event said the physical size of the region should not be increased. We should be looking at redeveloping the urban core.

How do you feel about this?

- I think they should expand more in the inner city, and increase the ability for the city to be stronger and better. It looks better [when there are] more houses and buildings and vacant lots filled in.
- [We need to] spend more time fixing up our neighborhoods. We have to go so far to the grocery store, and there's no real good public transportation. [You have to travel] so far to go get [anywhere] ... I would like to have less vacant lots because it brings drugs. We need to focus more on the neighborhoods and stand together again.
- I think there should be some redirection in our community – no matter what we are in color, trend or religion –we [can] come together. It takes more of us to stand by each other and help each other (village to raise a child). I have been trying to develop a twelve-step system to use [those] natural-born abilities. The economy is so terrible that by the time you go to school for education, you have to pay back your entire life and it is a downfall. The bailout has caused problems. I believe you can't develop a career from an unaccredited school – [but you're still in the] same position to pay back student loans. Emphasize how we [can] stand together and come up with how we are strong in areas and help each other. Instead of selling, give it together. The economy to me is a downfall – something that a man created and as far as the community and the environment and everyone living like back in the past like having gardens like producing and raising your own things. [We need to redevelop] honest values like our grandparents and help our mothers to become better parents ...

I just want to make sure we are focused. No censorship. We have to struggle with what our community is going to look like. But we need to focus on constructing. Let's make sure we're directly addressing this.

- I just wanted to know what those buildings would be and the opportunities that they would bring. Put them here, this is where the value is, and they are trying to move people out. Educate students more and pay teachers more because they are doing a grand job and they are leading tomorrow.
- I think it is important that we repurpose and [reconstruct] older neighborhoods. Our water mains are breaking and that is a 30-year project. South of the river, most of the water mains are very old and they are ready to be replaced. You have to look over the bridges, and all over the country, they have had to be ... rebuilt. Those are the things we need to look at to reconstruct. We need to look at some of the older buildings that need to be fixed or bring back things that need to be replaced.
- The buildings that exist now need to be refurbished instead of just building new things. People need jobs in the city that they can get to and make a living to take care of their families with.

We are talking about houses and buildings and you are saying they need more in the area?



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- There are some people that are having problems because they don't have jobs. And some people don't get hired and they need jobs to pay off their rent. ... The downtown buildings should be taken down [because] they are not used. We need to build more schools and increase the environment and help the economy and recycle trash. Instead of using gas, use bio-fuels.
- Seems like transportation becomes an issue because KC transportation is not working. A lot of the jobs are in Overland Park and Olathe and the transportation doesn't go there. What if we recruited businesses to come and reconstruct the "wastelands" and give them incentives?
- They do give tax breaks.

We heard that we should create more mixed-use neighborhoods. Would you live in a mixed-use neighborhood?

- It all starts with education. Sure, I would live in a mixed-use neighborhood.
- Bio-fuels and consumption would work perfectly for a mixed-use neighborhood.
- I try to stay in the Northeast neighborhood because it works out where I can walk. I can drive now but when I didn't it was horrible
- I would like a mixed-use neighborhood, being in a car all the time will make you sick because of pollution. If things are close to you, you don't have to worry about missing the last bus and walking so far.
- They are doing some things like this downtown, but what about the people who live in our neighborhoods that own our houses?
- Mixed-use is not foreign, but what you mean is more upscale. Some places you wouldn't want your kids to go to for security [reasons]. We should think of more upscale businesses – not eliminating the existing businesses – but make sure it is safe.
- What about crime? It is my opinion and I agree with her – I would like to see the beautiful settings and the upscale but you have to think about crime. We need to try to incorporate businesses that people won't try to go in and rob. The type of businesses we need, they actually make the product or a portion of the product in neighborhood, but it doesn't have any street value. Computers and other products and anything of value that can be traded on the streets, they will rob. We need to build things that have a value to the business community, but not so much a value to the robbers. You have to think about what type of businesses can thrive in the inner city. If you want to have mixed-use neighborhoods like you see on TV where everything is together, that is good but you have to figure out how to get the businesses set. We can't [just] have jobs, but well-paying jobs that are more than \$8 or \$9 an hour. Where people will hire 50 to 100 people at \$17-\$20 an hour so people will have something and make a difference. Lower-income jobs will allow you to survive, but if you want to grow, you have to have better-paying jobs. [Employ] a number of people and [produce] something that is not distinct that it could be traded on the street.
- Based on what he is saying, we need factories in here where people can take care of their families. And then that will bring grocery stores a better life and investments. Don't tear down the buildings.

What are we going to do with the older buildings?



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- Change from one use to another use.

People at our event said that builders should focus on one-level homes, accessibility and universal design. Can people stay in their homes from childhood to senior? Is this appealing to you and for your family?

- I think it is a great idea because the more we use the energy like gases and stuff, other energy we could use for our house, and we won't have the older energy because our houses might be taken away. Instead of using water from fountains, we could use rainwater and clean it out. If we don't do better conservation now, we won't have it in the future.

Anyone else have a comment on universal design?

- We need more senior citizen places in the communities that they are accustomed to – not in Belton. Once they come out of their home, they can go where they [want] to go.
- My mother-in-law lives on 33rd and Brooklyn and she has lived there all [her life]. Now she is older, she is like a prisoner because the bathroom is [upstairs].
- This sounds great, but if we went to one-level houses, what would you do with apartment buildings? If we don't have the apartments, we will run out of land. Build some houses like this, but retain the apartments. Don't want to see all of one thing ... I think [those homes should be made available for] those who need [them], but [we should] have a choice on what to buy.
- [I saw a] house that had a ramp instead of stairs; that's a good place for a senior citizen. You need something that will raise you if you have stairs instead of having someone else raise you up. Something like a little ramp and you can wheel yourself up there. A house where you can move around; not just one floor, but fixed so you don't have to go upstairs all the time. Don't need elevators to use more energy, and [we need to] conserve building materials.
- Yes, it is appealing, and diversity – not just one of one kind. I have a multilevel home, and my mom can be on one level. But still need houses with stairs to help live healthy and still a universal design to live in it for a lifetime.
- Older people don't want to move. We need to make the newer generation [understand] that when you get to a certain level, they need to [make it] appealing to want to move and get the money out of their house.

On Oct. 11, we had a discussion on efficient transit. How important is public transit to you?

- Very.
- It will probably be inconvenient to other people. If you are going to do it, you need to make a system to travel around the whole city, [which] will probably cause more debt. We need it, but ... what are we going to do?
- I have some questions about this. Is the assumption that it is only city funds instead of just state and federal funds? Cost is not the problem; [this] is an investment. If we are not connected, it is already a problem. If we don't look at it right now, it will not be done in 30 years and who will pay for it [then]?



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- You have to make the urban area to sustain commerce and facility traffic. I spent 45 minutes to go to the Sprint complex for a conference. When you talk about bringing businesses in, will it be a hassle to get people to work? We need to make this place a money magnet ... I am familiar with NYC and Washington, D.C., and they [have transportation systems that] get cars off the streets. Taking transit would save a lot of money.

People in previous conversations have suggested that mixed-use areas should be located adjacent to transportation corridors. Would that be attractive to you?

- I wouldn't live in that kind of congestion. It would be like living close to a power plant. Accessible but not in the heart of the urban area.
- It would be attractive to me.
- Attractive, but who will pay for it?
- You pay a lot more than the actual amount. The map you showed is because of desegregation in the school districts (**Editor's note: Maps are used in a PowerPoint during the sessions. See the One KC Voice site for a PDF version of the presentation.**)
- They call it "white flight."
- I have been to traffic jams here and other places, and this is nothing.
- From Grand to Broadway takes 45 minutes.
- I know a man in Manhattan takes an hour on the train.
- There is a benefit to mass transit for an employer: they don't have to build lots and [or subsidize a] parking system. That will bring their costs down. We [need a way to transport] people in and out [of the community] and have the community help in some way ... With buses and cabs [to] reduce the congestion, [there's] no use having all the mixed-use areas [if you have to] breathe in all the pollution. [It's a] good thing to have transportation, but emphasize bike trails. Things like Japan and China; thousands of people go to work that way.
- But you have to have jobs close to you.
- I think I would be OK living next to a major transit corridor, but how economically feasible would this be? We have to think about the gas and the costs and how much senior citizens have; the buses and how infrequently they move around. If we had more transit systems and styles, she would have more different ways to get home.
- Why are they going to Oak Park and Olathe because the businesses are there? We need employment here and more tax money. We need more people working here in Kansas City.

With energy costs and concerns about increasing pollution and climate problems, some support policies for alternative fuels. How do you feel about this?

- I think it is very complicated. With each one of the changes, you have to build infrastructure around it. With hydrogen and electricity, you need to have the way to fill up your car. There are consequences for every change, even if you go to a higher grade ethanol. It may sound out of the way, but you need to have a change where the community is more willing to help out. Not only political or financial or



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infrastructure – change in people themselves – like Obama said you are your brother's keeper. Some type of carpooling – share car or share fare and people there to help you. Institute some kind of barter system so people don't have to have so many cars.

- Like in a retirement place, like vans and facilities to take to doctors' appointments or shopping – cuts down on gas.
- Once people get into the city where they work – instead of buses that carry 40–50 people, once you get to the city, they carry 10 people or fewer and that would facilitate having fewer cars on the street. Something like color code or timing or something like that.
- All of those are very good and healthier for the city; walking and cycling = decreased emissions.
- We talk about the bigger cities that have this, but our cost of getting around to each other is not as high. In Michigan, there is a meter everywhere. Everyone has a bike or buses. We don't have the high cost of getting around, [which] makes people look for a better system and more efficient cars.

What role do you think government should play in transportation system?

- If there is less parking and [better service], people will start using more public transit.
- We would need to have public transportation. If you want to use bike trails and have the changeover you need to have businesses close to you – now they want a one-world economy – there is some support structure for these things. You need to have businesses close to you and strong transportation systems. A rail to connect.
- People are forced or indoctrinated into this.
- If you work downtown, it is easier to get on the bus and drop me off at my job. Now they are going to cut the buses in Independence, and how will I get to Wal-mart.
- What type of businesses are they planning to bring to KC? What mix?

The question was what role should government play? One of the things that people said was that in order to get the effective transportation and have a single authority regionally to make it happen. How do you feel about this?

- I don't think this is feasible. You have all the counties, then Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C.; they are concerned with bigger picture, and they won't give money for this community. It has to be something that we'll work with – maybe if we had a lobbyist for this.
- I think it can be done – all involved and get more people supporting and funding. In Maryland, some of the counties are interconnected.
- Like who would buy into KC?
- A lot of people who work in other counties can't get good jobs because of public transit. There is a great company in Overland Park, but more money will have to go to gas and insurance. We need more transportation to different counties.
- In this community, this is very unique, we cross a state line and function as one metro area – but have to have everyone's favorite have rail. One of the reasons we didn't get the light rail passed is



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because we didn't get everyone involved. Needs to be effective that are in the whole city. What about the philanthropists? When you stop poverty you stop crime.

The kickoff said we should have more green policies and more regulations and environmentally friendly. What do you think of this?

- Reuse old buildings – don't pull new materials – reuse old buildings with green products.
- Most of this conversation is what can we do to bring businesses and infrastructure, but what is it doing for us? Allow communities to build their own power grid, and we can sell some to another community ... Put solar panels on roofs or large areas that are not being used – use it for some type of solar cell thing where we could get our prices reduced and sell it to bring in more money and encourage the businesses we want to stay here [and invest in alternative infrastructure here], like bike trails and other projects.

So the government would be green enough that it would have a surplus to sell to others?

- We should incorporate something to give back to the people. All we talked about is giving it back but what do we get out of it? No money in individuals' pockets, but helps everybody. Like the area of Swope Park, make a percentage solar that would decrease [energy use] 30 or 40 percent. Gets something that helps us instead of constantly paying to help the people.
- They do provide tax credits for other types of electricity. A lot of electricity companies sell to other municipal areas, but investment is the biggest concern.
- I think that you always have to make parking astronomical for people to [take on] the pain of change. Entice people to go greener. The philosophical [key] is to take back more power and become more proactive on own so we can become more for the people and by the people.
- We are paying taxes for roads ... Help our pockets.
- Using Prospect, make a rail and then there wouldn't be any drive-by shootings.
- Change the negative to the positive.

Should government encourage local food development?

- I remember when I grew up in the country and the city would have a community garden – [when I would] help them [by] working in it, we got to benefit. We had more money – there are so many food banks that don't have food. Let's raise chickens, beef and make our own bread – gas prices going down and [we] have to pay the same amount for milk as gas. That is a hard choice on what to buy. [Am I going to feed my kids or get to work?]
- I think that it is important to have a clean environment. It benefits [us] ... but having the air and environment better off benefits our children. There are a lot of allergies [here]. KC being centrally located in the U.S., we can develop some kind of product that could be energy efficient. There will be different factory jobs coming back. We will have to have educational centers. Companies will not relocate in areas where the schools are not good. If we produce products that could be sold and



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transported out, then companies will want to come here. This is a good distribution area, and we have to educate our people.

- To some [extent] we do have this, like the City Market, but what it comes down to is are you willing to go there? Some stores you can buy locally grown, but it will be more expensive. Are you willing to pay more to do a little better for the community? You have to put in work to do community gardens; [if] we lack organizations [can] everyone come together?
- Maybe use the Internet in some way to encourage [people to be] community-minded.
- Hard to give to the community unless [you're] getting something back. What kind of incentive will we have for these [things]?
- The answer to that is to have more community gardens. All the empty lots you see, every corner where people live there.

A lot of packaging is thrown away right now. Would you be willing to pay more if you could redeem it when you turned it in?

Yes, majority said that they will pay deposit.

- Why [wouldn't] I? It is better for environment, but if you get money back, we will do better.

Should governments seek out industries environmentally proactive?

Majority said yes.

- If you don't, you will pay for it anyway.
- We won't get the jobs if we are not educated for it.
- It is easier to sell drugs than to sell a car.

Should citizen and community organizations be stepping up to help bring about some of these changes?

Majority said yes.

- A lot of the time, people don't have the money to pay back to go to school. I believe we should have more self-employed businesses where we can redirect [money to] the community.
- People need to take responsibility for themselves and take the initiative. Parents should be more responsible. If every kid got \$10,000 for [graduating], they could go to Rockhurst. It is about the people being responsible.

Which of these topics we talked about today should we include in our region-wide conversation on April 22?

- Access to efficient public transportation.
- Mixed-use neighborhoods.



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Which of these should move forward in the final conversation?

- Transitioning to alternative fuels.
- Creation of a central transportation authority.
- Government still owes something back from those we elected.
- I think Question 1 because of the energy crisis will create millions of jobs.
- Local food production and urban farming because we don't have a grocery store
- Green culture that will include job [creation].
- I think if you have green culture, city hall [alone] will not get [the job] done.