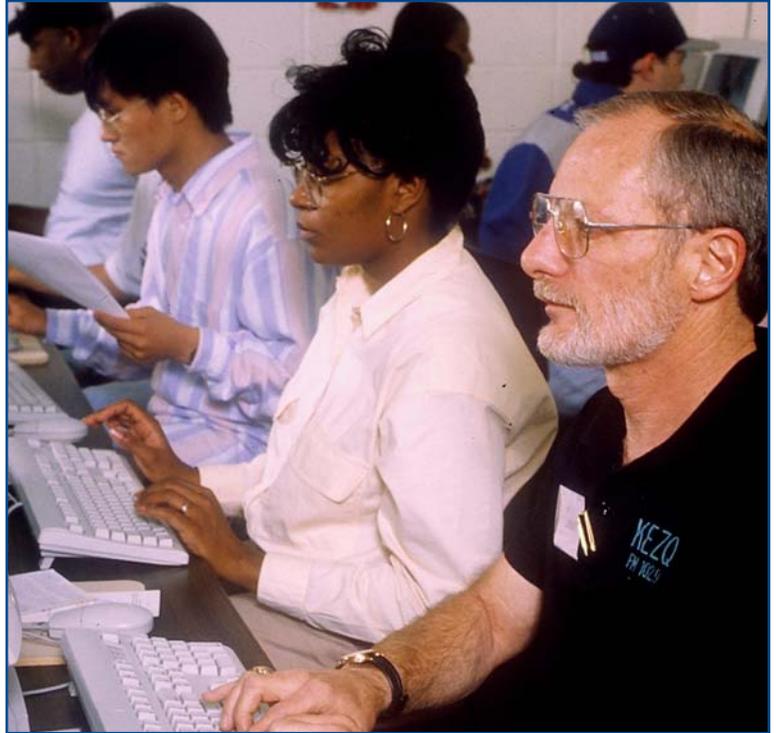


UNIVERSITY DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The University District is a body of people, a place, a partnership, and soon will be a redevelopment program entity.

PEOPLE

The University District area has a racially and ethnically diverse population of about 10,000 people. The residents are older and family sizes are smaller than the city's averages. Residents are mostly working-class people who take the opportunity to live in affordable housing in close proximity to mid-town and downtown Little Rock. Many are first-or-second generation homeowners who moved into the area when the neighborhoods were developed. Homeowners still outnumber renters, although the ratio of renter-to-owner is growing closer. Workers and students also contribute to the character of the District. Several thousand people work in the District, including 2,500 faculty and staff at UALR. Also, of UALR's approximately 12,000 students, 600, or about 5 percent live on campus, and the remaining 95 percent commute to the campus to attend classes.



PLACES

Located in the center of the Little Rock metropolitan area, the University District planning area encompasses 3.2 square miles. The area is framed by Boyle Park and the Fourche Creek wetlands on the west and south, by urban corridors on the north, and the Oak Forest neighborhood on the east. Two major arterial streets, University Avenue and Asher Avenue/Colonel Glenn, traverse the University District and link it to all major destinations in the metropolitan area. The UALR campus, consisting of approximately 200 acres anchors the District.



Several residential neighborhoods including Fair Park, Broadmoor, Point O' Woods, and the western edge of Oak Forest lay within the University District. The neighborhoods are comprised mainly of single-family houses constructed in the post-World War II period. Older commercial strips line the arterial street corridors in fragmented development and ownership patterns, and



older multi-family apartment developments border the commercial areas. Fourche Creek watershed tributaries border the District on the south and west, and one tributary, Coleman Creek, runs north and south through the middle of the UALR campus and the University District.

Over the past decade, several buildings have been constructed by individual owners for single purposes, such as banks and franchise restaurants. However, the larger commercial areas have not been modernized, and no new private residential development has occurred. UALR campus development, including 600 units of student housing, has been the primary public investment.

PARTNERS

For the past two years, several groups and organizations with direct interest in the University District have worked together to identify common interests and establish a 10-year vision for the District. The partners include the City of Little Rock, the Little Rock School District, business owners, bankers, church leaders, neighborhood and property owners association leaders, nonprofit organization representatives, and UALR. Representatives from these groups and organizations serve on the University District Steering Committee which participates in the revitalization planning process. The following is a summary of partners' roles and interests:

UALR. During the next decade, UALR will make major investments in its academic and research programs and campus physical plant. UALR leaders want to maintain the high quality of existing academic programs while expanding emphasis in new technology, academic, and research programs. Although the university has experienced slow growth in student enrollment, the anticipated new programs and facilities will accommodate an eventual student enrollment



approaching 20,000. The institution also anticipates joint ventures with private corporations to commercialize intellectual properties being developed through the University's technology and research programs. These ventures may lead to off-campus commercial development.

All of these initiatives will have a direct positive influence on the neighborhoods and commercial areas around the campus with more jobs and business opportunities. Negative influences may include increased traffic or developments that are incompatible with existing land uses. Conversely, neighborhood conditions and resources will influence UALR development. A thriving environment will augment or complement UALR's aggressive growth agenda. A declining neighborhood will pull against UALR's initiatives, especially deterring student recruitment and retention.

Neighborhood and Property Owners Associations. Neighborhood and property owner associations are active on both sides of University Avenue. The Broadmoor Property Owners Association, Fair Park Neighborhood Association, Point O' Woods Neighborhood Association, and the Oak Forest Movers and Shakers Crime Watch Organization are working to revitalize housing and retail enterprises, improve neighborhood-level public services, revitalize aging infrastructure, and prevent crime and urban blight.

Nonprofit organizations. Audubon Arkansas has a major interest in preserving and restoring the wetlands in the Fourche Creek watershed. Much of the southern portion of the University District borders the Fourche Creek wetlands. Audubon, UALR, the City of Little Rock, and a private engineering firm have teamed up to build the first phase of the Coleman Creek Greenway project on the UALR campus. The campus master plan recognizes Coleman Creek as a major campus asset. Other private nonprofit organizations, including New Futures for Little Rock Youth, Methodist Family Health, Lions World Services for the Blind, and the Downtown Partnership/Empowerment Zone are active partners in the University District.

Churches. Ministers and leaders of about a dozen churches located within the University District participate in the planning process, and several of these congregations will play an active role in the Partnership. Mosaic Church has a large outreach ministry within the area. Oak Forest United Meth-



odist Church and Fellowship Bible Church have established the Shepherds Hope Clinic that provides some free medical care to area residents. Although not located in the area, Fellowship Bible Church focuses its Sharefest community outreach ministry on insulating and repairing homes in the Oak Forest area.

City of Little Rock. Most of the community and economic development program approaches available to the University District Partnership either must be planned, authorized, or administered by the City of Little Rock. All related real estate development must be coordinated closely with the city's Planning and Development, Housing and Neighborhoods, and Public Works Departments. Public safety initiatives must work through the Little Rock Police (LRPD) and Fire Departments. The City focuses its neighborhood services in the District through the Tyler Street Alert Center. Neighborhood alert center staff works closely with community residents to ensure the delivery of city services, such as solid waste management and code enforcement. In addition, law enforcement officers that provide the Community Oriented Police Patrol program are housed in the neighborhood alert center.

Little Rock School District. All public education services for University District residents are provided by the Little Rock School District. Elementary students attend Bale, Wilson, and Franklin Elementary Schools. Middle and high school students attend schools outside the University District area. Recently, the Little Rock School District converted the Southwest Middle School into an alternative school called W.D. "Bill" Hamilton (Southwest) Learning Academy. UALR and LRSD already cooperate closely on several initiatives designed to improve the schools in the University District. Children International, a private foundation based in Kansas City and administered locally by UALR, provides vital after-school programs along with health and dental screens to eligible students in six LRSD elementary schools, including Bale, Wilson, and Franklin. Also, administrators, instructors and staff of LRSD and UALR participate on the Central Arkansas Educational Renewal Zone (ERZ) program board. The ERZ program is authorized by the Arkansas General Assembly for the purpose of building program relationships between Colleges of Education at public universities and school districts. The UALR College of Education administers the Central Arkansas ERZ.



Redevelopment usually entails making public investment in physical infrastructure to create market demand to stimulate private investment. It may also include investment by public or private nonprofit organizations to revitalize neighborhoods and housing with a goal of reversing population loss and accompanying decline in property values.

The River Project area of downtown Little Rock is a good example of successful redevelopment of an area that had been declining for decades. Community leadership adopted a shared vision and shared goals to make the



William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library

downtown areas adjacent to the Arkansas River a primary destination for entertainment and tourism. Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County invested public funds in building Alltel Arena, expanding the Statehouse Convention Center, and implementing the River Rail Trolley system. They also cooperated in attracting the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library to the riverfront area. These three major public facilities attract hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, which created a market demand for private investments in restaurants, shops, and hotels. In addition, the Central Arkansas Library System chose to locate its central branch in the River Market District and is redeveloping an adjacent block for an Arkansas Studies Institute. Now, the public-private investment is providing the stimulus for several nonprofit organizations to also build major facilities in the area. These include Heifer Project International, Care Link, and Lions World Services for the Blind. Demand followed the public investment and stimulated private investment in the area. All told, this investment in the River Project area exceeds \$1.2 billion.



Banks. The major financial institutions in the area operate branch banking facilities and provide retail banking services to University District residents and businesses and to UALR. Five of the area banks participate financially in underwriting expenses of the University District Partnership. These include Arvest Bank, Bank of America, Metropolitan National Bank, Regions Bank, and Twin City Bank.

Other Potential Partners. Several other public agencies provide programs and services within the District and have provided information during the planning process. They include the Central Arkansas Library System, Central Arkansas Transit Authority, Central Arkansas Water, Little Rock Housing Authority, and several state agencies. The University District Partnership will work with these agencies to implement redevelopment plans.

PROGRAMS

State and federal laws provide a number of vehicles for focusing public and private investment to stimulate redevelopment of residential and commercial areas. During the next several months, University District partners will consider which of these

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program vehicles should be used and how to utilize existing resources more effectively. The partners will also research model programs in other states to determine whether additional legislation is needed to accomplish the District's goals.

Redevelopment in Little Rock. Redevelopment programs operate in different organizational forms in several areas of Little Rock. Organizational forms can include redevelopment districts, zoning overlay districts, community housing development organizations, special improvement districts, or some combination of all of these. All of the redevelopment approaches require City of Little Rock involvement and approval.

Design Overlay Districts are the most widely used redevelopment form in Little Rock. The city establishes these districts to impose additional requirements, limitations, or restrictions beyond those of the underlying zoning district. Overlay districts are used to establish uniform site development and building standards for all properties within a particular geographic area. Overlay districts have been established for the following areas: Chenal Financial Center, Highway 10 Scenic Corridor, River Market, Midtowne, Presidential Park, Granite Mountain, and Central City.

CDC and Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO) are nonprofit organizations that focus on affordable housing and neighborhood improvements. Although CDCs are private, independent entities, they often rely on federal grant funds administered by city government. Also, CHDOs must be certified by the city to qualify for receiving affordable housing funds. Presently, several CDCs operate in the Little Rock/North Little Rock area, including Black Community Developers (BCD), Downtown Little Rock, Central Little Rock, College Station, and Argenta. Two additional organizations, The Arc and Unto Others, are classified as CHDOs.

Special improvement districts allow property owners within a specific area to tax themselves in order to make various types of capital improvements. These districts can be formed by the independent action of property owners who will benefit from the specific improvements. They must comply with state laws on public notice, and hearings, governance, audit, and other requirements. Improvement districts have been established throughout Pulaski County and Little Rock for various purposes. They are often created to help property owners finance expensive water, sewer, and drainage facilities. For example, Metrocentre, a special improvement district that encompasses much of downtown Little



Rock, was formed in October 1973, to redevelop portions of downtown and construct parking facilities. The Broadmoor Property Owners Association, formed in the mid-1950s, functions as an improvement district. Property owners agreed to a tax to improve and maintain common property, including a lake, swimming pool, tennis courts, playground, and community facility. Act 517 of 2007 strengthened the state's enabling legislation to authorize Central Business Improvement Districts, which may provide an effective vehicle for developing real estate and improving public services in the University District.

Redevelopment districts are authorized under state law and can be established by city ordinance. The ordinance sets a framework and time schedule for planning and making public improvements to stimulate private investment in declining or distressed areas. Redevelopment districts:

- Can use tax increment financing to fund major infrastructure projects over a long period of time. However, the redevelopment plan has to determine whether the anticipated increase in assessed value within the district will be sufficient to finance the infrastructure improvements.
- Can be used to acquire and consolidate property necessary for improvements and reinvestment.
- Have been established by ordinance within the City of Little Rock for the Midtowne Redevelopment District #1 and the Little Rock Port Authority.

Recent decisions by the Arkansas Supreme Court confirm that the first 25 mils of the property tax base is reserved for public education and cannot be used for tax increment finance projects. The court decision reduces considerably the revenue that can be generated by a tax increment finance district.

However structured, each redevelopment program reflects the unique character of the geographic area it intends to improve. Each redevelopment program results from advocacy and activism by people, organizations, and institutions directly interested in the well-being of the area. The University District Partnership will employ the program vehicles best suited to its redevelopment needs.

