

Revitalizing East Jefferson

Collaborative uses Midtown as a model

BY SHERRI WELCH
CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Can Detroit's East Jefferson corridor be the next Midtown?

Joshua Elling and the **Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan** are betting on it.

Elling, who heads up the **East Jefferson Corridor Collaborative**, is taking cues from what worked in Midtown and putting them to work along the corridor.

However, East Jefferson's attributes are different than those of Midtown, with a blend of historic neighborhoods, the largest concentration of boat slips in metro Detroit, an industrial district and commercial and office buildings.

"We've looked at what's worked throughout the city ... obviously (East Jefferson) is a different entity," without the major anchor employers, he said.

But Elling and the collaborative are emulating efforts in Midtown to reduce crime and provide beefed-up safety plans, working closely with the **Detroit Police Department** and private security firms in the area.

"I think the important thing that Sue Mosey and (the **University Cultural Center Association**) did was take ownership of the area," Elling said.

"Once you do that, you start paying attention to all the problems and you're going to drive down crime."

The East Jefferson corridor links the downtown area with the budding east riverfront and the Grosse



BRENDAN ROSS

Joshua Elling of the East Jefferson Corridor Collaborative says it's crucial that residents feel a sense of ownership of an area: "Once you do that, you start paying attention to all the problems and you're going to drive down crime."

Pointes, where many working in Midtown live.

"The water's edge is going to develop," said Mariam Noland, president of the Community Foundation.

"We want to make sure that development and the existing (east Jefferson) neighborhoods can benefit."

Over the past five years, the Community Foundation has invested \$27.2 million dollars in revitalization efforts on Detroit's near-east side through its Detroit Neighborhood Fund.

The New York-based **Ford Foundation** and the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** in

Battle Creek helped to seed the fund with a total of \$15 million.

Earlier this year, the Ford Foundation made another grant of \$500,000 to the Community Foundation in support of the work, and the Troy-based **Kresge Foundation** awarded \$25,000 to the **Villages Community Development Corp.** to fund pedestrian improvements to the Van Dyke corridor a little farther east.

Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corp. is funding work in the neighbor-

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Mariam Noland, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

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hoods, and the city continues to be a key investor with the allocation of community development block grant funds.

“I think you’re going to see Midtown develop and then (see development) go east, in an L shape, (with) Eastern Market and the Dequindre Cut bridging the two neighborhoods,” Noland said.

The Community Foundation’s Detroit Neighborhood Fund investments target an 11-square-mile area on Detroit’s near east side that is bound by Woodward Avenue to the west, McClellan Street to the east, the Detroit River to the south and Gratiot Avenue to the north, with Eastern Market just outside those boundaries and providing a link to Midtown.

Many of the Detroit Neighborhood Grants have gone to support community engagement of residents, increased access to fresh food for residents, public safety and beautification.

But the bulk of the grants — \$18 million — has gone the past five years to seeding anchor institutions that will have a permanent impact on the near east side neighborhoods, Noland said.

Those anchors include paving magnate Robert Thompson’s \$15 million math and science charter high school, which opened last fall in a renovated Albert Kahn-designed former furniture warehouse; **Oakland University’s** allied health training classes at the former **St. John Hospital** on

Jefferson; the Dequindre Cut greenway, built on an abandoned rail line; and a \$35 million senior community planned near the east riverfront by **Presbyterian Villages of Michigan, United Methodist Retirement Communities** and **Henry Ford Health System**.

The Community Foundation invested years to bring the institutions together on the senior project and a \$2 million grant to purchase property for it.

To continue and lead collaborative efforts in the neighborhoods, the Community Foundation spurred creation of the East Jefferson Corridor Collaborative of residents, businesses and major institutions with revitalization plans for the length of Jefferson Avenue, from downtown east to Alter Road on the border of Grosse Pointe — and all the neighborhoods in between.

“There was not an organization like (**Midtown Detroit Inc.** on the near east side ... (to) do the bigger deals and bring together diverse interests,” Noland said.

The **East Jefferson Business Association** has led economic and community development efforts in the area since 1994, with Elling joining in 2007 to head the collaborative. Elling, 35, a former account executive with real estate data company **CoStar Group** who holds a master’s degree in urban planning from **Wayne State University**, convened a number of groups to form the East Jefferson Corridor Collaborative.

Among them: **Downtown Detroit Partnership, Villages Community Development Corp.,**

Detroit Economic Growth Corp., the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Stroh Cos., Pewabic Pottery and Rivertown Detroit Association.

The East Jefferson collaborative is looking at how it can work with existing CDCs and other groups to collaborate on stabilizing and supporting residents and companies in the neighborhoods along Jefferson, Elling said.

It’s using a \$600,000 grant made by the Community Foundation early this year for operations and streetscape improvements on Jefferson, economic development efforts and a new crime and safety manager to work within the Rivertown and Indian Village areas to improve safety.

And it’s working with the DDP on planning for public-private collaboration along the Jefferson corridor, as well as improvements to make Jefferson pedestrian- and transit-friendly, working from a report completed last year by local architect **Hamilton Anderson Associates.**

Improvements could include reducing the number of travel lanes on Jefferson, enhanced street lighting and benches or “street furniture,” curbside and side-street parking for patrons of businesses on Jefferson.

“We also want to make Jefferson as transit-ready as we can, for enhanced bus service and possibly more robust transit forms such as rapid transit through rail or street car,” Elling said.

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