

Plan to offer ideas for economic revitalization of Westside

By Rafael Tammarillo
Review-Journal

A 24-square-mile area, known as the Westside, is viewed by the federal government as one of the most depressed areas in the country.

But the mostly black Westside could be on the verge of a comeback, as the first step in a major, sustained effort to draw millions of investment dollars into the area — to rebuild

and diversify its ravaged economy — nears completion.

Glynda White, former teacher and holder of a law degree, is the economic development specialist who is in the process of preparing the final draft of a plan to breathe new life into the 24-square-mile "special impact area" that includes most of the Westside.

The plan was commissioned by the U.S.

Department of Commerce and the city of Las Vegas last year. Soon to be completed, it is expected to be the most intensive look ever at the demographics, economics and human and physical resources available to the impact area.

The plan also will propose between 15 and 20 projects — each costing between \$100,000 and \$500,000 — and is designed to revivify the once vital, now depressed

and neglected area.

White, 34, said the main object of the plan and the projects it proposes is "job creation and job diversification . . . That's what we have to do to become a wholesome and viable community."

The \$93,334 study was financed 75 percent by the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) and 25 percent by the city of Las

Vegas. It is administered through the Nevada Black Chamber of Commerce, which employs White and her assistant.

The studies for the plan were conducted by a panel of specialists in economics, public health, transportation and utilities, and representatives and business, government, industry and finance from throughout Nevada.

White has two months to

prepare the 200- to 300-page final draft of the plan, which must be in the hands of the Commerce Department by June 30, and which will be reviewed by regional and national Commerce Department officials in Seattle and Washington, D.C. If Commerce officials find that some of the 15 to 20 suggested projects have merit, the government could provide seed money to get things moving.

White said the Commerce Department is likely to look favorably on projects from "special impact areas" — Commerce's designation for the most depressed areas nationwide. And, the department, under Reagan administration guidelines, looks favorably on projects that involve private-sector participation, which many in the Westside plan will.

"The government has stressed more participation by the private sector," White said. "The EDA has stressed that if these projects can show private participation, they will be strongly considered. One goal is to reach out to the private sector . . . Our primary goal is job-creation."

White said the list of projects will be made public when the final draft of the plan is complete.

The area suffers from several major problems. Chief among them, the planners say, is its negative image. White and others point out that, although the impact area has the lowest crime rate in Las Vegas, the public perception tags it, unfairly, as a hotbed of crime.

Boarded-up, vacant buildings along the once bustling D Street do nothing to add to the community's prestige.

Gwyn Brown, executive director of the Nevada Black Chamber of Commerce, elaborated on these problems.

"We are talking about high unemployment, very low per-capita income, an (average) educational level of 10 years, 65 percent of the work force in service jobs, problems manifested by land speculation in the area," she said.

"We are talking about only one bus line. There's not a single bank in our area, no savings and loans, no insurance companies, poor quality houses — old and poorly made. There's a lack of sophistication within the entrepreneur business community.

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