

OUR VIEW

Westside
Non-story

A story in Wednesday's Review-Journal about yet another high-profile architect working on a new downtown project — in this case, famed Houston developer Larry S. Davis who plans to build 101 lofts made from corrugated steel on drug- and prostitute-plagued East Fremont — should rile the thousands of West Las Vegans who've had to travel miles outside their neighborhoods to grocery shop since the Vons on Owens and H Street closed months ago.

East Fremont has been a criminal outpost for decades and is as deserving of attention and revitalization as any area in town. So the issue here isn't hating on East Fremont. The real question is why West Las Vegas, which suffers similar maladies (disinvestment, which has begat crime), can't seem to land a high-profile anything. As needed as they are, the restaurants, government and municipal services and educational facilities that have come to the Westside recently do not equal revitalization.

Compare this to what's taken place downtown the last few years: Opening of the \$5 million Ice House Lounge, \$23 million City Centre Apartments and the \$80 million Las Vegas Premium Outlets. Barrick Gaming spending more than \$80 million to snatch up a handful of downtown properties. Near completion of a new IRS building, as well as the first of three buildings that will comprise the nearly \$2 billion World Market Center, which will turn Las Vegas into one of the world's furniture capitals. Drive past Las Vegas Boulevard and Hoover and you'll see workers building the hull of SoHo lofts. Over on Charleston, near Main Street, the former Holsum Bread Factory has been converted to lofts. And every first Friday, thousands of people flock downtown to the Arts District for food, fun and culture.

And downtown's future seems even brighter: planned academic medical center and performing arts center, an Alzheimer's research facility designed by the legendary Frank Gehry and, possibly, a sports stadium. There's also talk of a grocery store like Costco or Trader Joes. Either way you slice it, Downtown's got it going on.

Meantime... over in West Las Vegas. The shiniest new offering is a CVS Pharmacy.

What's it going to take for the Westside to start getting in some of the action? Across the nation, inner cities are being revived (and in some case, returned to their former glory). Baltimore. Harlem. Houston (where Davis' steel lofts have been well received). Why not the Westside? According to proprietors of the under-construction Edmond Town Center on Owens Avenue and H Street, demographic studies show there are enough rooftops and high-enough discretionary income to support a supermarket. So what's the hold up?

Some have argued that too much of the money that flowed into the now-closed Vons was of the food stamp variety and businesses simply can't run on government handouts. Cockeyed rationale at best. Said argument flies in the face of the fact that industry has existed on the Westside for nearly a century, much of it not powered by food stamps.

And is there any better time than now to engineer change on the Westside? Ponder this: There's probably been no other time when the so many of the city's Black powerbrokers (from lawmakers to social architects to entrepreneurs to civic activists to educators) have been on one accord. Blacks are key figures in the major casino companies, key figures on state and municipal decision-making bodies, key figures in education, key figures just about everywhere. And yet, nothing — well, at least nothing significant.

Is downtown that much better than the Westside, or is the difference between innovation (East Fremont) and stagnation (the Westside) a matter of leadership and energy. Mayor Oscar Goodman indefatigably promotes downtown, never missing an opportunity to stump for his favorite place. Maybe the Westside needs a similar cheerleader (emphasis on leader).

POINT OF VIEW



LVHA execs nix affordable units

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

Something happened on Friday that I feel compelled to write about.

In June 2003, Mayor Oscar Goodman revamped the board of the Las Vegas Housing Authority because they couldn't get their act together. Despite your best efforts, Mr. Mayor, it's time to take another look. Your Housing Authority is up to its same old tricks — and it's not the board that's running the agency, it's the staff. So, until the staff changes, you're recycling the same old crap, and the agency will never reach its fullest potential. It's apparent that the factions of the board are acting at the behest of the staff, which is providing inaccurate information to them.

While housing authorities all across the country are facing major budget cuts, the esteemed Las Vegas Housing Authority Board, in its infinite wisdom, made a conscious decision on Friday to nix the Otto Merida housing complex, located at 28th and Sunrise, which would have consisted of 78 single-family residences for sale to low income residents.

This decision cost \$1.7 million in developer fees (income that would have been paid to the Housing Authority); plus \$200,000 in fees, a portion of which were already paid out to the engineer

ON THE
RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

and architect, and inclusive of an amount still owed to Community Development Programs Center of Nevada (CDPCN); and it cost three years of the Housing Authority staff's time. The project was halted after the land was graded, before any homes were built, after three years of planning Otto Merida.

Why? Why would the Housing Authority, which touts its relationship with CDPCN — an entity they've partnered with to put 400 rental units on line here in Las Vegas; worked with on the purchase of Gerson Park; and from whom they received \$2.7 million including interest for the land CDPCN purchased for Gerson Park, a project which created 208 affordable for sale units — want to split such a fruitful relationship.

The board's contention is two-fold: First, they say they need to develop a strategic plan and see what monies they have available; secondly, they were told by their auditor that they need Project Specific Agreements between LVHA and the developer, which should have been drawn up by the Housing

Authority but weren't.

Are these good enough reasons to split a relationship and throw away money when the LVHA's very own auditor told them that they were headed in the right direction? How can two dissenting board members now say they need a strategic plan? Why wasn't a plan developed when they first came on the board nearly two-years ago? Where was their strategic plan when they entered into an agreement to rebuild a 60-unit apartment complex on East Charleston at \$216,000 each when they can build 78 three- and four-bedroom single-family residences, 1,300 to 1,500 square feet,

for hard costs of \$123,000 per unit? Do the math. Why don't they know where their money is or where it's been going when they have been sitting commissioners for 22 months? What's wrong with the strategic plan that was in place?

Let's visit the strategic plan issue first. The Otto Merida development, bearing the name of the Executive Director of the Latin Chamber, was part of a strategic plan to revitalize a blighted area, and the plan had been put in place by the previous administration in conjunction with Councilman Reese, the School District and CDPCN. The School District built the new schools, the City built the Senior Center, CDPCN built 52 units of affordable rental housing, LVHA rehabbed 40 public housing units, and this homeownership initiative (See LaGrande, Page 12)

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