

## **North Omaha Development Project Description**

In the spring of 2006, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce began a series of meetings with business leaders who had facilities or investments of significance in North Omaha. The purpose of these meetings was to ascertain the level of interest in carrying out a study for North Omaha that would be similar in scope and process to the successful Destination Midtown project. (See [destinationmidtown.org](http://destinationmidtown.org) for more information about Destination Midtown.) The invitees to these initial meetings represented medium to large businesses in the area bounded by I-680 on the north, Cuming Street on the south, 72<sup>nd</sup> Street on the west and the Missouri River on the east. This very large area was identified in order to include the maximum number of firms who should be informed and might be interested in the project and because of the population in North Omaha who were likely employed by these businesses. About two dozen business, economic development, community college and city representatives attended the first few meetings.

These meetings centered around two main issues. First, several studies of North Omaha had been conducted in the past but there was the perception that implementation of these strategies had been inconsistent. There was genuine concern that the North Omaha community would not support yet another study. After considerable discussion, it was clear that previous studies of North Omaha should be reviewed in order to mine any appropriate strategies. And, in order to make this process different from the former studies, there needed to be an imbedded implementation strategy and funding for staff and operations identified up front. This study therefore would be only the first step in developing a dynamic North Omaha area.

The second main issue was funding for the project. The Destination Midtown project was begun by several large institutions in the Midtown area that have a history of investing in projects to support their neighborhood. The North Omaha area is not blessed with the same concentration of large business headquarters. Nonetheless, it was clearly important to the participants in this project that a fundraising strategy be established. In response to this concern, a preliminary budget was developed for the study, estimating that the study costs and staff support to implement the plan would be similar to those of Destination Midtown. A budget of \$350,000 for the study process and \$125,000 per year for three years was identified as the fundraising target.

To date, the Chamber, several large corporations, private foundations, African American business leaders, North Omaha businesses and individuals have committed \$725,000 for the development study and three years of operating funds and staff support to implement the plan.

The study area was refined following discussions (see attached maps). There are several key points regarding the study area that are important to note up front. First, the area is defined by Sorenson Parkway on the north, Cuming Street on the south, 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street on the west. However, studies planned, completed or currently underway of surrounding areas will clearly have an impact on the North Omaha area and vice versa. In addition, the key transportation routes between North Omaha and these

surrounding study areas need to be addressed as we develop the strategy. Therefore, the 24<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to the south, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to the north, the 30<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to the north, the Ames Street corridor to the west and the Sorenson Parkway corridor to the west are to be considered in the analysis of North Omaha. The final concern relative to the study area is the western boundary of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. This western boundary overlaps the eastern boundary of the ongoing Benson-Ames Area Study. This shared study area is the strip of land between Sorenson Parkway and Cumming Street and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fontenelle Blvd. Attention to details in this area will be important to ensure that conflicting strategies are not developed.

The study is intended to lay out an economic development strategy for North Omaha. The strategy will be project-oriented and packaged so that interested parties in the private sector will readily understand the opportunities available in North Omaha. Included in the strategy will be recommendations for infrastructure improvements, community development opportunities, housing initiatives and other quality of life initiatives that will make the economic development strategy successful. The process for developing the strategy will include public input opportunities at various stages of the process.

A steering committee for the study is being developed and will work closely with the selected consultant to oversee the development of the plan. The steering committee will be incredibly important to the ultimate success of this project. It is intended that it will provide broad-based leadership that the community at-large will accept and with which they will feel comfortable communicating.

In collaboration with the steering committee, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce will hire a consultant and monitor the process. It is also intended that the Chamber will eventually hire and house the staff leader for this project. In this way, the Chamber will be able to provide in-kind support in public policy, economic development and communications services to the North Omaha Development Project.

As fundraising efforts come to a successful close, it is now time to embark on this exciting journey. By the end of October 2006, the steering committee will be in place, the fundraising will be completed and the consultant selection process will have begun. By June or July 2007, it is projected that the implementation mode will have begun for the North Omaha Development Project, with a staff director hired and a permanent board seated to see this project through to its successful conclusion.