

# THE ZONE

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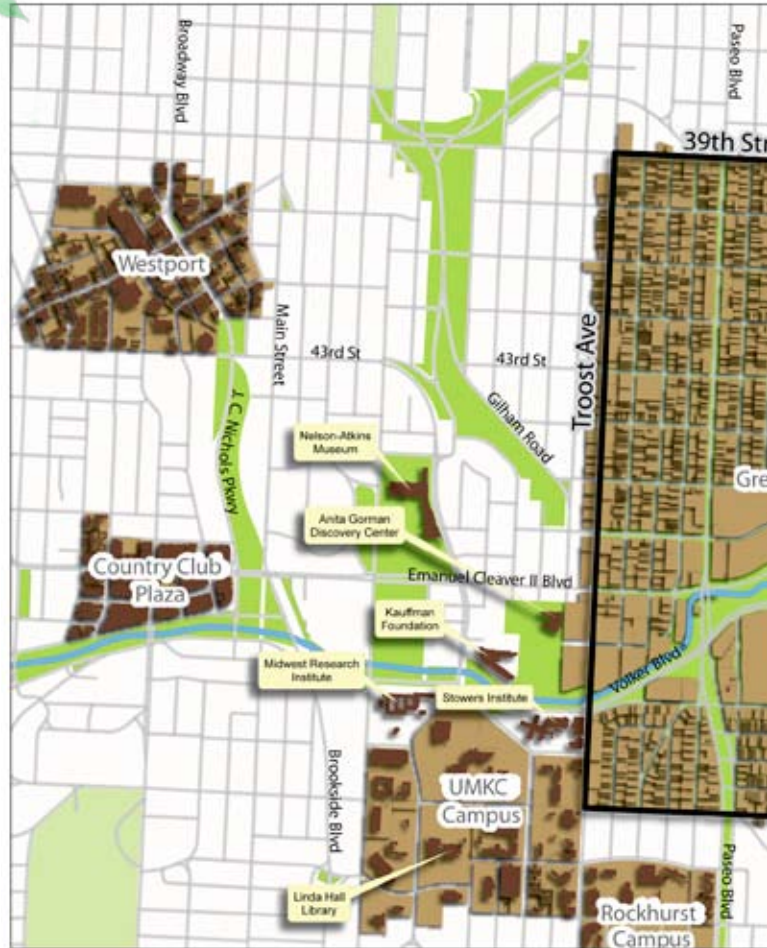
A blighted 150-square-block area of Kansas City, Mo., known as the Green Impact Zone, for many years has experienced severe economic decline and residential property abandonment. U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II formed the Zone with the assistance of the Mid-America Regional Council of Kansas City to combat the many problems residents face. K-State, and in particular the faculty and students in the College of Architecture, Planning and Design, joined this project to create interdisciplinary solutions to these issues.

## HISTORY OF THE GREEN IMPACT ZONE

The Zone is located east of the Country Club Plaza and Westport and is bound by Troost Avenue, 39th Street, Prospect Avenue and 51st Street. According to the Zone's Web site, at the time the initiative got its start, less than half of the homes were owner-occupied and 20 percent of all mortgages were delinquent. The median home price was \$30,000, and statistics suggested unemployment could be as high as 50 percent.

The area and the Zone initiatives have caught outside eyes. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood visited the Zone in February to announce the \$1.5 billion Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program, of which \$50 million was awarded to Kansas City.

These grants are giving the Zone funds to begin working on



Top: The Kansas City Green Impact Zone boundaries and nearby sites. Left: A rendering of Kansas City's 43rd Street shows how the addition of trees and improved pedestrian walkways can change the look of an urban area.

# *Kansas City's most blighted neighborhood sees a rebirth on the horizon with the aid of federal grants and K-State design expertise*



Courtesy

their top initiatives as identified by neighborhood leadership, according to Anita Maltbia, director of the Zone Initiative.

“Housing, employment, access to fresh food, youth development, public safety and energy and environmental conservation were important issues to the residents and us,” she said.

While this is a long list of priorities, the Zone staff drafted a plan for the Mid-America Regional Council’s consideration and that is when K-State got involved.

Dennis Law ’76, professor of landscape architecture, met with David Warm, executive director of the Council, and asked if there was a project in Kansas City the college could assist.

“He mentioned the Zone and introduced me to the staff,” Law recalled. “We couldn’t have asked for a better team of people to work with. They provided endless data, met with us on three occasions, critiqued the work, gave guidance and, at the end, accepted the student work as valuable to the project.”

The unique aspect of this project was its interdisciplinary nature involving three departments in the college — architecture, interior architecture and landscape architecture.

“Students formed teams that identified problems, studied alternatives and formulated plans and design solutions to contribute to the project,” Law said. “Teams focused on open space, transportation, housing, commerce and neighborhood development.”

## **THE ZONE CAN BE A NATIONAL MODEL**

Maltbia and her staff said the development’s impact on residents and businesses has been motivating.

“When people live with disappointment and a long downward spiral, it is easy to lose hope,” she said. “The Zone offers so many possibilities for the community and for the people. Those possibilities are so exciting.”

The Zone staff, residents, business owners and architecture students created a multi-year plan. The first year includes the creation of programs for renewable energy education and assistance, job training and employment programs. Initiatives for public safety call for the involvement of local police officers and neighborhood volunteers.

“The Kansas City Green Impact Zone is a model,” Maltbia said. “Whatever successes we learn in this area can be replicated in other areas of the city. (The federal government) wants it to be a model for the nation.”



Courtesy

A student rendering shows how modern homes, designed like those on the same block, can be built on vacant lots to restore a neighborhood’s residential vitality.