

CITY OF BELTON: NEW STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

by Carolyn Yatsook

A fresh chapter in the growth of Belton opens as the new Community and Economic Development Department completes its first year in operation. The Department was created by the City Council last year to place responsibility for the development of Belton's business community in-house by aligning it with the Community Development Department; thus, creating the Community and Economic Development Department. The move streamlines the development process with a single point of contact, from the initial meeting through permitting.

The new department has focused on improving business outreach and creating alliances. Every effort is made to promote Belton as the city of choice for new development by marketing to the Kansas City metropolitan area, the nation and the globe. A first-class online presence has been established through the creation of the economic development website; www.belton.org/ecodevo. This presence drastically expands the reach of the City's efforts with local business and site selectors. To foster a competitive advantage, Belton has joined as investor partners with the

Kansas City Area Development Council with the belief that a regional approach is necessary to recruit primary jobs. City leaders are optimistic that this change in philosophy and strategy will build a strong and diversified local economy.

The city of Belton is poised for success and continued growth due to its advantageous location in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Only 17 miles south of Kansas City, Missouri, on one of the newest stretches of interstate in the nation, Interstate 49, everything from major league sports to world-class shopping and dining are minutes away. In fact, I-49's new interstate status has a direct correlation to Belton's recent commercial growth.

COMMERCIAL BOOM

Academy Sports and Outdoors greets Belton residents and visitors from its newest location on Markey Parkway as they exit the newly constructed interchange at I-49 and 163rd Street. Academy Sports is the first tenant to open in Belton Gateway, a new 47-acre, \$70 million, mixed-use retail complex. Future development includes an additional 174,000 square feet for retailers, restaurants and a proposed hotel. Due to the strategic positioning

and the high visibility from I-49, with a current estimated traffic count of 85,000 vehicles per day, the area is receiving tremendous interest from national retailers.

Additionally, Menards has purchased ground on Markey Parkway for a new store to be under construction by the summer of 2015, with an anticipated opening in January 2016. The Menards site plan includes six outlots for sale that also are attracting attention from national retailers. Just up the Parkway is Belton's newest commercial addition, the Pavilions of Belton. This development is in the preliminary planning stages and features direct I-49 frontage.

CREATION OF BELTON-CASS REGIONAL TDD

The key to this significant commercial growth is due to the construction of the City's all-new Markey Parkway; a new four-lane road. Recognizing the opportunity of I-49 frontage and raw, undeveloped land between the interstate, another major retail development and two interchanges, Belton decided to take a strategic approach. The City, with assistance from the county



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and coordination of the landowner, created the Belton-Cass Regional Transportation Development District (TDD) for the sole purpose of funding this project. The momentum originated from a commitment to business growth within city and county leadership.

The Belton-Cass Regional TDD is in an established area with a meaningful history of retail sales. The boundaries are large and the project is constructed in multiple phases. The City was willing to advance funds for certain street improvements, with the understanding that it would be reimbursed later, at the time of the bond issuance. Short-term bonds were strategically used to kick-start the project, facilitating the engineering of the Parkway. The long-term bonds were issued via direct placement and provided the TDD with more favorable borrowing costs. The use of financial advisor, Piper Jaffray & Co., allowed the TDD to consider various financing options and provided a higher level of transparency to the bond issue process.

CONSTRUCTING MARKEY PARKWAY: IN PHASES

Markey Parkway is a long-term transportation project, being constructed in phases. Phase 3, past the future site of Menards, is nearing completion and is expected to be open to traffic in January 2015. This phase connects Markey Parkway from 163rd St./Route Y to Mullen Rd. at Route 58. Also included in this phase of the project is the extension of Towne Center Drive that now connects between Kohl's and Target and intersects at the Parkway. In addition to the commercial benefits, the Parkway and Town Center Drive will improve the safety and welfare of residents and visitors by creating new traffic patterns, lessening the congestion on Route 58. Consistent with the Belton Trails Master Plan, the Parkway will eventually include an extension of trail and sidewalk systems, further connecting the community.

Future phases will create a more efficient roadway system by increasing connectivity throughout the City. The next phase is already in planning stages and will make the connection to North Scott Ave. It is anticipated that this connectivity will catalyze redevelopment in this important older section of town. Beyond that, Belton's long-term plans envision Markey Parkway eventually connecting the interchanges of 163rd St. and North

Cass Parkway along I-49. North Cass Parkway is a \$10.1 million dollar interchange project that opened in July 2010 and is a blank slate for development. The importance of Markey Parkway cannot be overstated as it changes the landscape of Belton's commercial core and connects the old with the new.

REVITALIZING AND CONNECTING THE CITY: NORTH SCOTT CORRIDOR

The North Scott corridor has been a vital part of Belton's economy in the past. However, today, the City is left with an aged-commercial corridor mixed with a variety of land uses, many of which are not compatible with newer commercial uses. Though it will take years of careful planning and coordination, city leadership is committed to the regeneration and revitalization of North Scott and has contracted with Confluence, a landscape architecture, planning and urban design consultant, to update the City's plan for the corridor.

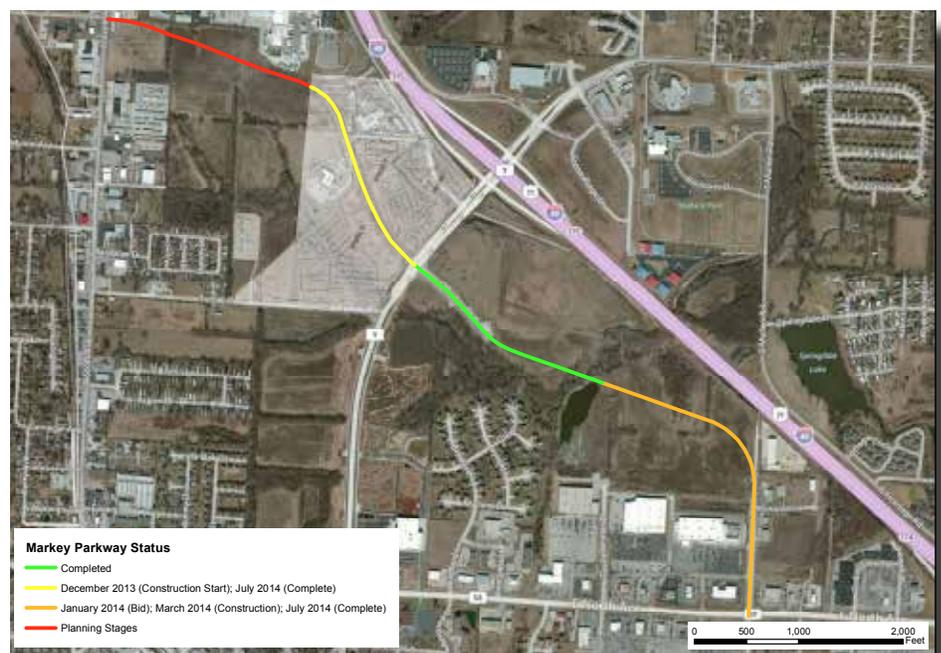
The revitalization of the North Scott corridor is critical to Belton's growth. Its connection to I-49 via the soon-to-be reconstructed 155th St. Interchange and its eventual connection to Markey Parkway (the next phase), North Scott has the potential to be a significant area of redevelopment.

REINVENTING A GATEWAY: 155TH ST. INTERCHANGE

To accommodate future growth in residential population, the growing volume of traffic on I-49 and the increased truck traffic from the backside of CenterPoint Intermodal, the 155th St. interchange will be reconstructed by the Missouri Department of Transportation. Construction is anticipated to begin in early 2016. Significant reconstruction of 155th St. is planned to complement MoDOT's interchange replacement. 155th St. will be widened to the east, with costs shared between Belton and Grandview and to the west, with costs shared between KCMO and the Port Authority of Kansas City. Upon completion, these projects will reinvent the gateway to Belton.

PLANNING FOR GROWTH: LARGEST WATER TOWER IN MISSOURI

Belton is committed to responsible growth. The citizens of Belton approved revenue bonds to construct a new 3-million-gallon water tower. This water tower is 112 feet tall; the bowl at the top is 110 feet in diameter; and the pedestal is about 60 feet in diameter. This will be the largest water tower in the state of Missouri, due to its volume. The City was successful in securing low-interest loans from the state that will save millions of dollars in interest



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expenses over the next 20 years. Belton has planned and is ready for new development!

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Between 2000 and 2010, Cass County saw a growth rate of 21 percent (source: Mid America Regional Council, Regional Workforce Intelligence Network). Cass County's population forecast projects growth of 60 percent by 2040, according to Jeff Pinkerton, of MARC. Belton is the gateway to Cass County and is well-positioned and prepared for such growth.

Businesses and families establish themselves in communities where people want to live. High-quality parks contribute to an excellent quality of life, spurring economic development by attracting homebuyers and boosting residential property values. Belton knows firsthand the importance of a strong park system. Parks are an essential component of its infrastructure. The community supports seven parks, including a 59,000-square-foot wellness center with more than 11,000 members, an outdoor water park, and the area's first all-inclusive public

playground for children of all ages and abilities. In 2013, the park added Memorial Station, a state-of-the-art events building nestled in the heart of historic Memorial Park. This facility has become a gathering place for the community.

The most recent addition to the park system is Cleveland Lake that was completed in 2014 and serves a dual function. This project is part of the Storm Water Master Plan and was engineered for the purpose of being a major storm water feature. It includes a one-mile asphalt walking trail system, two boardwalks, three fishing jetties and a boat ramp for citizens, adding leisure and recreational facilities for public use. Belton is making every effort to attract future residents.

CONCLUSION

Belton's new structure for economic development has enabled a streamlined approach to improve development outcomes. Strategic partnerships and forward-thinking city leadership puts the community on a path to continued growth and success. □

Carolyn Yatsook has been a city of Belton employee since 2007 and now holds the title of Economic Development Specialist; a newly created position. She performs a wide variety of administrative duties, statistical research assignments, promotion of the City through the development of marketing materials and the establishment and maintenance of the City's new economic development website. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Kansas and is currently enrolled in The University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute (OUEDI). She can be reached at 816-331-4331 or cyatsook@belton.org.



Quik'n Tasty, a distribution center for QuikTrip convenience stores, is Belton's largest employer with just under 1,000 employees.