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San Antonio's Westside Development Corporation offers new hope for revitalization of *Making Connections* area

Linda Wilson, *Making Connections-San Antonio* Diarist

On June 8, 2006, San Antonio's City Council voted unanimously to establish the Westside Development Corporation (WDC), a targeted redevelopment authority that is expected to offer San Antonio's Westside a new chance for revitalization and economic expansion. The 7700-acre area targeted for the Westside Development Corporation contains more than 100,000 residents, and boundaries closely approximate the *Making Connections-San Antonio* area. *MC-SA*, along with City Councilwoman Patti Radle and others played a catalytic role in helping give birth to this new corporation - a first for San Antonio.



Earlier efforts formed a precedent for launching the corporation. When the Defense Department down-sized Brooks and Kelly Air Force Bases, the City funded successful redevelopment authorities that brought new industry and growth to those areas. As she watched other parts of the City get funding, City Councilwoman Radle, who represents a major portion of the West Side, asked Ramiro Cavazos of the City's Economic Development Department to research ways to bring more funds for economic growth to the West Side. The development corporation concept began to take shape, resulting in a resolution authored by Councilwoman Radle.

In a parallel, but separate effort, *Making Connections* and the Annie E. Casey Foundation had commissioned two studies by Mr. Robert Weissbord of MetroEDGE to determine economic development opportunities for the *Making Connections* area. In concluding its research, MetroEDGE validated the Westside's latent spending power and potential for retail expansion. The study also provided research data that validated the need for establishment of a local development entity, similar to the WDC.

Making Connections was able to work with Councilwoman Radle and the other three City Council sponsors as they built momentum for adoption of the Corporation concept and funds to actualize it.

In addition to approving the concept of the Corporation on June 8, the City adopted a \$600,000 appropriation to fund it for two years, agreeing that the Corporation would be governed by a 17-member community board. The board includes representatives from various sectors, including

business, education, health, nonprofits and others. Two board positions were reserved for community residents.

WDC holds promise for jobs and investment

The WDC holds great promise for the underdeveloped economy of West San Antonio. According to Alamo WorkSource, only 24% of Westside residents have graduated from high school. Average unemployment in the area is 13%, and median household income is \$22,000 per year. Per capita income in the Westside is \$9,000, compared to \$27,281 for the City as a whole.

Many job generating companies have bypassed the area, even though there is a willing work force, as well as several vacant sites that can be packaged for commercial or industrial development.

To attract economic development, the Westside Development Corporation will have the capacity to buy and sell property and issue bonds. The Corporation will conduct a real estate study to establish development potential and create a website to market the area to potential investors. Part of the City's \$600,000 allocation goes to hire staff and open a Westside office for the Corporation. Private investment from foundations can be incorporated to expand the Corporation's budget.

Councilwoman Radle believes *MC-SA* is a very positive force in the Westside. She says, "They are having a big impact in the Edgewood area, particularly in the areas of workforce development, family strengthening and family economic success. *Making Connections* is getting people to look at things more broadly. It's linking projects and programs and systems together."

Other projects complement the Westside Development Corporation



According to Victor Azios of *MC-SA*, adoption of the Westside Development Corporation is part of an interlocking set of initiatives that puts the West Side in place for substantial future economic growth. *Making Connections* has been involved in each of these initiatives.

They include Westside Education and Training Center (WETC), the Centers for Work and Family (CWF), and Neighborhood Place-Edgewood (NP-E).

Thanks to these new initiatives, the future of San Antonio's Westside looks bright.

The workforce pipeline will be greatly enhanced, as workers carry the skills they learn at the Westside Education and Training Center and step into jobs that created through the Westside Development Corporation. Supportive services available at the Centers for Work and Family and Neighborhood Place-Edgewood will offer needed economic and social supports to help parents build better lives for their children.