This UNI Community Update is dedicated to the amazing people and organizations who are partnering with us to transform the urban heart of Kansas City. Their guidance and collaboration are the reasons behind UNI’s growth and success.

It’s an exciting time to live in Kansas City, and great things are happening in the 10 neighborhoods we serve: the new Kansas City MLB Urban Youth Academy at Parade Park; new incentives for redevelopment like Mayor Sly James Shared Success Fund and LISC’s $4 million predevelopment loan fund; UNI’s new Kansas City Neighborhood Academy; and the ongoing work of neighborhood associations, nonprofits, and foundations.

UNI (You and I) stands for Urban Neighborhood Initiative. Five years ago, the KC Chamber, partnering with United Way of Greater Kansas City, named UNI one of its “Big 5” goals for Kansas City. Today, UNI is an established 501(c)3 organization, governed by a diverse board, and advised by our neighborhood partners.

We’d like to thank the many businesses, charitable organizations, and individuals who have supported us throughout our first five years. We have sincerely appreciated your financial support and hope we can count on that support in the future. We know that success is measured incrementally, and UNI is in this for the long haul.

Thank you for your interest in and support of UNI. The neighborhoods we serve are improving and getting stronger daily. As we continue to respectfully listen to one another and work together, our future is bright.

Steve Roling  
UNI Board Chair/Big 5 Champion

Dianne Cleaver  
President/CEO
Long before the Urban Neighborhood Initiative was even an idea, neighborhood organizations were already hard at work, intent on improving and revitalizing the communities in which they live. Our neighborhood partners have been and are essential to UNI’s success.

Our partners are building community gardens, orchards, and playgrounds, and working on streetscapes, new curbs, and sidewalks. They’re working with the police to decrease crime and close drug houses. They’re developing block leader programs and hosting clean-up and dumpster days.

It is a privilege to work with them.

**Neighborhood Organizations**

- **Beacon Hill - McFeders Community Council**  
  *Virginia Evans, President*

- **Blue Hills Neighborhood Association**  
  *Paul Tancredi, President*

- **Boston Heights - Mt. Hope**  
  *Esther Kershaw, President*

- **Center City Neighborhood Association**  
  *Eddie Tapper, President*

- **Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council**  
  *Dennis Robinson, President*

- **Key Coalition**  
  *Karen Slaughter, President*

- **Historic Manheim Park Association**  
  *Diane Charity, President*

- **Squier Park Neighborhood Association**  
  *Howard Townsend, President*

- **Troostwood Neighborhood Association**  
  *Wanda Taylor, President*

- **Wendell Phillips Neighborhood Association**  
  *John James, President*

**Community Service Agencies**

- **Blue Hills Community Services**
- **NHS (Neighborhood Home Solutions)**
A cradle-to-college education pipeline + mixed income housing + new resources and services + community quarterback = a transformed neighborhood.

That’s the successful formula used by Atlanta-based Purpose Built Communities to revitalize a blighted Atlanta neighborhood, and it’s the model adopted by the Urban Neighborhood Initiative, the community quarterback for the Wendell Phillips Neighborhood Initiative.

“It’s a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization model,” says UNI Executive Director Dianne Cleaver. The model seeks to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by transforming neighborhoods of concentrated poverty to mixed income neighborhoods with a high quality school at the center.

UNI has been working with Purpose Built on the effort for the last four years and, in 2016, became the 15th member of the Purpose Built Communities network, joining cities like Indianapolis, New Orleans, and Fort Worth in working to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by building strong, economically diverse communities.

Also in 2016, UNI took its first big step in implementing the Purpose Built model with the opening of the new Kansas City Neighborhood Academy (KCNA).

KCNA is a neighborhood school for neighborhood children with a strong emphasis on literacy and Project Based Learning. The school has a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) theme and offers both a Literacy Center and a Mathematics Center to accelerate students’ proficiencies.
KCNA opened its doors on August 2, 2016, welcoming over 130 students in Pre-K through second grade. A month earlier, UNI announced grants of $1-million from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and $600,000 from the Hall Family Foundation to be used for instructional support for KCNA. At the news conference announcing the grants, CEO Cleaver said, “We deeply appreciate the generosity of both the Kauffman and Hall Family Foundations and thank them for their votes of confidence in KCNA.”

“I’m excited by the opportunity to build a strong foundation for our youngest learners as we launch this new endeavor,” says Dr. Robin Henderson, principal of KCNA. “We are collaborating with our families and the community to create an environment that encourages our students to be adventurous, creative, and risk-takers.”

The charter school is sponsored by Kansas City Public Schools and governed by its own board of directors. KCNA is located at 1619 East 24th Terrace.

Meanwhile, UNI has acquired options on a large number of parcels in the Wendell Phillips Neighborhood. The plan is to bring an array of quality mixed-income housing to the area to reduce concentrations of poverty. UNI and the neighborhood are partnering in planning for the mixed income housing and the addition of “community wellness” services.

The Purpose Built model was developed in the 1990’s as an effort to transform a poverty-ridden Atlanta neighborhood, East Lake Meadows. Today, the once-grim neighborhood boasts excellent early childhood education centers, a high-performing pre-K through 12 charter school, a YMCA, mixed-income housing, and a strong sense of community. Violent crime has decreased by more than 90 percent; employment of low-income adults has increased from 13.5 to 100 percent for those who are work eligible (not elderly or disabled); and the charter school – Drew Elementary – went from worst to among the best performing schools in the district.

Applications are open now for the 2017-18 school year for Pre-K through third grade and new students are accepted throughout the school year.

For more information, call 816-418-1500 or visit: http://kcneighborhoodacademy.org/
The Urban Neighborhood Initiative will expand its capacity to serve as the development “quarterback” for a new and exciting initiative in the UNI area.

It’s called the Kansas City Catalytic Urban Redevelopment Initiative (KC-CUR) and is a partnership with the Greater Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) and the City of Kansas City, Missouri.

It’s been difficult to move many previous efforts from planning to implementation including identification of a development entity with sufficient capacity and financing necessary to execute large-scale, transformational redevelopment. KC-CUR is an effort to change that, with a strategy that includes a sustainable vision, financing model, and a system for ongoing management. The goal: to launch redevelopment of sufficient scale to be transformational in the UNI area and beyond.

Following the engagement of a consultant team to lead nine months of data collection, review of previous plans for the east side, and engaging hundreds of residents and community stakeholders, three focus areas were identified for KC-CUR’s work: the 31st and Prospect area, 31st and Troost area, and Ivanhoe Neighborhood’s 39th Street Corridor. Subsequently the partnership decided to add the Purpose Built Communities area, the Wendell Phillips Neighborhood Initiative, given the UNI’s extensive work on that initiative.

UNI’s role

UNI will function as the “master developer,” leading a range of redevelopment projects and complementary programs that build social capital and create safe places to live, work, and play. UNI will serve in a variety of capacities, including project planning, coordination with related projects and programs, promotion, public engagement, and project sponsorship. Additional staff will be hired, allowing UNI to build the talent and financial balance sheet to fulfill this role.

It was decided that UNI should serve as the quarterback for development “because of its commitment to partnering and collaborating with neighborhoods, as well as its relationships with business, civic, and community-based organizations throughout the study area and city. Equally important is its unwavering commitment to resident-driven solutions and evolving neighborhoods of choice.”
What’s ahead

LISC will provide technical assistance to UNI and help the organization build the capacity to implement the KC-CUR strategy. LISC will also take the lead in structuring, coordinating, fundraising, and managing a $25 to $40-million capital/equity fund. The new fund will provide zero percent project investments and low-interest loans to development projects that meet the KC-CUR criteria.

The City of KCMO will target public investments and strategies that can be implemented in the four priority areas, which might include public infrastructure improvements, TIFs, Community Improvement Districts, land acquisition, and the like.

MARC and the Urban Land Institute will continue to lend their expertise in areas such as planning, transportation, community services, federal and state funding, and real estate development.

[Map of KC-CUR priority areas]
Vacant and abandoned properties are a curse to a neighborhood, increasing crime, reducing property values, increasing costs for city government, and increasing risk to public health and welfare.

It’s estimated there are 3900 vacant houses and vacant lots in the UNI neighborhoods.

In response, UNI is leading “Vacant to Vibrant: The Vacant Properties Community Impact Initiative” (V2V). The hard-working group of 45 community leaders and representatives from more than 30 organizations first came together in March 2015. Active partners include agencies of the federal government, KCMO City Departments, developers and real estate entities, public and private financial providers, and key community entities such as the KCMO Police Department, Legal Aid of Western Missouri, University of Missouri –Kansas City, and Mid-America Regional Council.

The path to bringing a vacant property back to life is difficult and murky, so V2V action teams were formed to work on five critical impediments to the process.

Clearing Titles: This group has engaged pro bono legal services to draft a template for quieting titles as well as to quiet the existing backlog of clouded titles as it authors a white paper outlining the local problem, costs and remedies as a tool to advocate for legal, policy and regulatory changes at the city, county and state levels. The group will work to push implementation of key strategies identified.

Marketing Vacant Properties and Promoting Neighborhoods: In 2015, the group developed the concept of and specific criteria for UNI Market-Building Demonstrations Blocks. In 2016, UNI took applications and selected three neighborhood blocks to help build a healthy block and thereby strengthen the neighborhood and spur the market in adjacent blocks. We will work to attract investment and will use the block as a “learning lab” as we work through barriers to transforming vacant properties. All phases of the process are implemented in close collaboration with neighborhood partners.
Integrating Green Spaces and Urban Farms: In 2015, this team piloted educational sessions to help neighborhoods better understand the value of and ways to transform vacant land into green spaces and urban farms. The team is writing and publishing a Guide to Working with Lots to educate residents how to design green spaces on vacant lots. The Guide will provide templates for green projects each of which outlines the costs, level of expertise needed and the amount of maintenance required to assist in decision making. We will also provide workshops along with mini-grants to implement projects.

Promoting Process Innovation and Efficiency: This action group works to delineate processes as they are and secure buy in to simplify them as needed. Last year, this group developed a model of how to acquire Land Bank property, the first step in developing a comprehensive website to inform and guide those interested in purchasing and rehabbing vacant properties. This group has explored processes related to codes, permits and tax abatements and will continue to do so while advocating for improvements and building out an informational website.

Securing Funding: This action team has assembled an initial list of funding sources and incentives that will evolve into a comprehensive financial resource to guide local buyers and potential investors. Group members are also researching an innovative financial tool to deploy in the UNI to help finance vacant property projects. The group will help fill gaps identified for implementation of plans in the Demonstration Blocks.
UNI’S COMPREHENSIVE PLACE BASED STRATEGY

UNI’s strategy includes a variety of additional programs that address the three areas prioritized by our neighborhood partners: **Prosperity, Health and Safety, and Education.**

Recent work includes:

**UNI Hiring Fairs:** More than 400 job-seekers and 24 employers attended UNI’s fourth annual Hiring Fair in September, 2016. The event included a pre-fair workshop for career seekers as well as a bank of computers and technical assistance to complete job applications. The fifth annual fair will be held in September, 2017.

**Connecting Neighbors:** UNI is making its contribution to the effort to eliminate the digital divide through a three-pronged approach: access to computers; wireless technologies, and technology skills training. In partnership with the Center City Neighborhood, Connecting for Good, the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center and KC Digital Divide are providing computer training for neighborhood residents as well as basic cabling and has piloted community based connections in the Center City Neighborhood. The program is working to understand the needs of residents and make this community based Internet connection available to more residents.

**Safe Communities:** Expected to wrap up in early 2017, this UNI pilot focuses on Historic Manheim Park neighborhood with particular emphasis on eight square blocks where there has been a higher level of crime. The goal of the pilot is to reduce crime and create a healthier, more livable community through increased law enforcement presence and community organizing, training and engagement.
Health Fairs: UNI held its second annual Health Resource Fair in November, 2016. The event, which served over 475 adults and children, was in partnership with the Junior League of Kansas City, and Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center. Flu shots, health screenings for adults and children, health information, warm hats and gloves, food bags and vouchers for a Thanksgiving turkey were provided. In May, 2016, the three organizations teamed up for a Fun & Fitness Fair, focusing on families and children and promoting healthy nutritional and activity habits going into the summer. The event included free bags of fresh produce for participants.

Dolly Parton Imagination Library: Getting books into the homes of under resourced families and fostering a love of reading in young children from birth to age five is the purpose behind this initiative. UNI has done extensive outreach to enroll 550 children in UNI neighborhoods. These children now receive an age-appropriate book mailed to their home every month, thanks to a partnership between UNI and United Way of Greater Kansas City/Women’s Leadership Council.

Success by 6: In partnership with United Way and Kansas City Public Schools, UNI’s Success by 6 Center at Richardson Elementary School provides educational training and materials for traditional parents, non-traditional parents, teen parents, child care providers, early childhood educators, and parent educators. The center’s Toy and Resource Lending Library is filled with educational toys, books, and games appropriate for children from birth to age 8. These resources can be checked out at no cost. The center is staffed by a Parent Educator from the Parents as Teachers Program who provides training and advises parents/care givers.
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Since 2012, UNI has worked closely with the ten neighborhood associations in its service area to identify critical needs, provide educational opportunities and develop cross-sector partnership. We are proud to collaborate with UNI on many initiatives including improving early childhood educational opportunities and making a coordinated long-term plan to redevelop land and homes left vacant or abandoned. Our collective work eliminates systemic barriers and creates a healthy environment for generations to come.

- Paul Tancredi, President, Blue Hills Neighborhood Association

UNI has been a solid partner for neighborhoods since it started about five years ago. It has recruited volunteers to help us deliver flyers about our association meetings. It has also brought resources to our families, such as free books being mailed every month to young children through Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. They also had a very beautiful Little Free Library built and installed in front of one of our early childhood centers. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with UNI.

- Esther Kershaw, President, Boston Heights/Mt. Hope Neighborhood Association

Our partnership with UNI has proven to be a driving force in our current success as a neighborhood association….. From capacity building of the HMPA board and block leaders, creating innovative strategies to reduce crime and promote safety to establishment of our Demonstration Block on Forest Avenue, UNI consistently provides guidance, support, ‘boots on the ground’ assistance as well as technology to reach those so important to us ~ residents, young and old!

Oft times, simply an interested listening ear made all the difference.

Kudos to UNI! Our heartfelt appreciation will be with you always.

Forward together! Backward Never!!

- Diane Charity, President, Manheim Park Neighborhood Association

For five years, UNI has worked closely with the ten neighborhood associations in its service area. The results of five years of planning, development and relationship-building are three major initiatives – Purpose Built Communities, Vacant to Vibrant: Vacant Properties Collective Impact Initiative (V2V), and the Kansas City Catalytic Urban Redevelopment (KC-CUR). These initiatives help UNI fulfill their overall goals of increasing prosperity, improving health and safety, and ensure a high-quality continuum of education for residents in an area of Kansas City that has suffered from neglect and disinvestment.

- John P. James, President, Wendell Phillips Neighborhood Association