

North Omaha effort not just another study

■ Chamber officials say \$725,000 has been raised to examine and implement an economic development plan.

BY CHRISTOPHER BURBACH
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Leaders of a new north Omaha economic development effort acknowledged today that a

skeptical public has heard this kind of announcement before.

But they vowed it would be different this time — that action will follow the words of this latest north Omaha study.

The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce raised enough money — \$725,000 — to not only put together a plan but also to begin implementing it, said David G. Brown, the chamber's president and CEO.

He was flanked by more than 40 people on a steering committee, including several African-American business leaders and pastors, Mayor Mike Fahey, Douglas County Commissioner Chris Rodgers — and the chamber's self-proclaimed biggest critic, City Councilman Frank Brown.

"This is a great day for north Omaha and the future of north Omaha," the District 2 councilman said, adding that he expects the initiative to produce a plan that is going to be executed.

The effort will look for large-scale economic development opportunities — from re-

tail centers to manufacturing — and seek private investors to make them happen.

Dick Davis, CEO of Davis Cos., and Dennis O'Neal, executive vice president of First National Bank, will co-chair the steering committee leading the effort.

David Brown said money already raised from businesses, foundations and other donors includes funding for three years of "implementation." That includes hiring a full-time director, as the backers of Destination Midtown did.

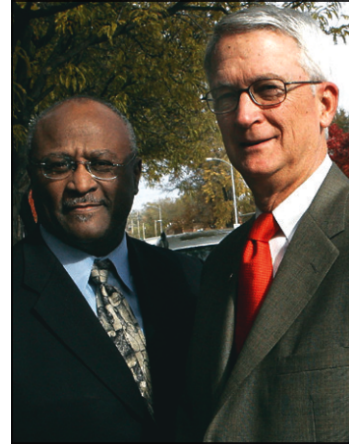
Supporters of the north Omaha strategy have expressed an interest in backing specific projects once they are identified, David Brown said.

He said chamber leaders think the time is right for such an effort, with redevelopment occurring in neighborhoods around north Omaha.

Despite some progress in north Omaha in recent years, that part of the city has been largely left out of the city's economic growth.

David Brown said the idea was inspired by a challenge from Councilman Brown when the chamber and city announced a plan last year to redevelop north downtown.

"Our board is committed to the



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Dick Davis with the Davis Cos., left, and Dennis O'Neal with First National Bank will head the steering committee leading a north Omaha initiative.

idea that the whole community can grow like the city is growing economically," he said.

The project would focus on an area between Cumming and Fort Streets, from 16th to 52nd Streets.

"I've got a list on my wall of about 30 chamber studies," Councilman Brown said. "I've been very critical. . . . North Omaha and the whole city are tired of just hearing what's going to happen in north Omaha."

What makes this effort different, he said, are the facts that it has deadlines and a paid staff to implement a plan — and he and other community leaders in leadership roles to keep it on track.

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