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Zilber Neighborhood Initiative expands south side revitalization



Mike De Sisti

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors is renovating 3122 W. Mitchell St. as part of the Zilber Neighborhood Initiative grant of \$875,000.

By [Georgia Pabst](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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The \$50 million, 10-year Zilber Neighborhood Initiative to revitalize poor Milwaukee neighborhoods will expand on the south side to include three neighborhoods that are part of the Layton Boulevard West Neighbors area, Zilber Family Foundation executive director Susan Lloyd announced Thursday.

The area encompasses Silver City, Burnham Park and the Layton Park neighborhoods that are bounded by 43rd St. on the west, Layton Blvd. on the east, Lincoln Ave. on the south and Pierce St. on the north. It's also contiguous to the 35-square-block Clarke Square neighborhood, which was one of the first two areas named to receive grants from the Zilber Family Foundation two years ago.

"Clarke Square is densely residential and by increasing the south side footprint to a total of 170 square blocks there will be increased opportunities to support and expand a variety of activities, including school improvement, commercial development and investment," Lloyd said.

It also makes the south side project more comparable in size to the north side Lindsay Heights initiative, which includes 110 square blocks, she added.

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, a nonprofit, will be the lead agency directing the new development efforts in the three neighborhoods. It will receive \$875,000 over four years to hire staff dedicated to the initiative, operating expenses, and technical and planning assistance to create a quality-of-life plan to guide the project, Lloyd said.

"We're so excited because this means a total new injection of investment to help us take on a comprehensive neighborhood plan initiative," said Charlotte John-Gomez, executive director of Layton Boulevard West Neighbors.

"We want a plan that will include tangible and sustainable goals and then roll up our sleeves to accomplish them within the next five years."

In all, the Zilber Family Foundation is awarding \$1.6 million in new grants for a variety of projects. In addition to expanding to the Layton Boulevard area, the foundation is making these awards, Lloyd said:

- A \$500,000, two-year grant to the Menomonee Valley Partners and the Urban Ecology Center to assist in planning and development of an estimated \$26 million series of projects to create new resources and connections between the valley, Clarke Square and Silver City.

The new joint venture by the partners and the ecology center includes building a new branch of the ecology center in a 100-year-old tavern that will be converted to a learning lab located in a new park, said Ken Leinbach, executive director of the center. The new park will be created on 24 acres that's a long and narrow strip between S. 27th and S. 37th streets underneath the viaducts.

- Another project includes connections to the Hank Aaron trail.
- A \$300,000, two-year grant to Habitat for Humanity for its Brush with Kindness program, which will help homeowners make repairs in both the south side neighborhoods and Lindsay Heights.

The south side addition marks the first major expansion of the initiative since it was announced two years ago by the late real estate tycoon and philanthropist Joseph Zilber.

Zilber grew up at N. 10th St. and W. Meinecke Ave., behind the grocery store his parents ran. It's an area that now is part of the Lindsay Heights neighborhood, one reason he selected it for his new initiative. Zilber died in March at the age of 92.

Initially, it was envisioned that the Zilber Neighborhood Initiative would expand to a total of 10 neighborhoods.

Lloyd was hired by Zilber as a consultant to design the program here because she had worked for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in Chicago, which helped finance a similar initiative, called the New Communities Program. It operates in 16 neighborhoods.

But in Chicago, neighborhood identity is clearly established, Lloyd said. In 1933 the University of Chicago codified 77 neighborhoods in the city, and they remain clear identifiers for residents to this day, she said.

"It's become clear to me over the last two years that Milwaukee, unlike Chicago, is not as neighborhood centric," she said, adding she finds residents identify more along north and south lines.

"Milwaukee developed differently. Some areas are called by subdivision names or cross streets," Lloyd said. "There's not common agreement, and I've come to appreciate that."

So instead of adding neighborhoods every year, the Zilber Initiative will now look to concentrate and "drill down on south and north side neighborhoods and expand the footprint to adjacent areas," she said.


More attention will be paid to outcomes and to the spillover effect in places like the Menomonee Valley, with potential for economic development that affects the entire region, she said.

Since the initiative began, Lloyd estimates that a total of about \$10 million has been allocated.

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