

But, one thing is for sure. The redevelopment of the 600 block will involve razing buildings and building new ones.

The principle author of the tax increment finance law (see box), Commissioner Clark, says rehabilitation will be encouraged. But, the law makes new construction more attractive. Tax increment financing can't pay for improvements to existing buildings. To entice developers, the law gives developers a free ride by paying for site clearance and preparation through a tax break to the builder. More profits are made in new construction, making rehabilitation less attractive.

According to Arnold Berman, Democratic candidate for 2nd Dist. State Senate, the biggest danger of tax increment financing "is that this type of urban redevelopment is reflective of the philosophy of 'boomer' type growth whose only purpose seems to be to diminish and corrupt all those aspects of life in Kansas we enjoy. The 19th century downtown will be replaced with faceless, characterless, concrete blocks, devoid of charm, contemptuous of our heritage and totally homogeneous."

West said that rehabilitation isn't likely. "Time and time again has shown that rehabilitation isn't going to be cheaper," he said. "You've got to let economics dictate how some of those decisions will be made."

"The question ultimately is one of economics. If you can't make the rehabilitation of buildings feasible, then you have no choice."

The private developer that decides to build won't have the only say about what is done. The Commission and the Planning Commission will have to give approval. The developer must present an economically sound proposal, and they will have to meet to City Building Codes. But, there will be no controls of building style. It has to be safe, not beautiful.

Not all who we interviewed ignored the historical value of the 600-block buildings. Arthur Townsend, director of the Watkins Community Historical Museum offered his observations, suggestions, criticism and questions.

"Lawrence is primarily a low-scale town, he explained. "That is, the height of Massachusetts determines the height of the rest of the town. Until the bank tower was built, it was primarily a two-to three-story town. I would hate to see that change. Everybody has a lot of sunlight. There's a broad view. If you start high-rising, then you get the same problems of shadowing that are in the city. You get a different outlook on the town,

"How much of our past are we willing to wipe away? Our historic past is a resource that is not renewable. Once it's gone it's gone. You can't rebuild it. If we continue to lose the historic fabric then the aspect of why many of us live here will be gone.

"I don't know at this time what it costs to renovate space in Lawrence. But, it's certainly worthwhile to do feasibility studies. I have no doubt that there are ways that buildings in the downtown that can be rehabilitated and can be utilized.

We can't afford to lose too many more buildings in this town. It would just make awfully good sense to retain as many buildings as we can. I hate to see us lose any more."



THE LAWRENCE NATIONAL BANK TODAY AND YESTERDAY... WHERE NOW IS PROGRESS?

Townsend said that it will be possible to prevent a disastrous redevelopment in the 600 block, but the lines of opposition in the fight must first be seen clearly.

**T**ax increment financing is a new form of urban renewal with a twist. It offers builders a tax break to spur activity in the downtown area.

According to Glenn West, a Chamber vice-president, several things prevent developers from building in a downtown.

"Unlike the developer who could say go out to the area around Kasold and purchase some open fields to locate a new shopping center, the developer that comes into a downtown is faced with deteriorating buildings and land that will need to be cleared before he can build."

Tax Increment Financing provides an answer. It allows the City, through power of condemnation, to seize property; clearing up problems in ownership, and assembling parcels of land so the developer will not be faced with dealing with several persons.

After the City has paid for the land and site clearance and preparation, total costs will exceed what the developer is willing to pay, according to market value. This is where the financing comes in.

The City becomes the developer's financier by issuing Special Obligation Bonds to make up the difference between what the developers offer and what the City has invested. Paying off the bonds, for the developers at least, is easy. Instead of paying all of their taxes on the new property, once developed, the increased taxes are channeled to pay off the debt.

According to West, the east side of Mass., excluding the Opera House, now generates about \$11,000, in taxes. "It might, say, generate \$100,000 to \$150,000 in taxes with a new building," West said. "The \$80,000 to \$90,000 increase could then be applied to pay off the special bonds."

And that's how it works. A sweet deal for the developers. The City does the dirty work, acting as the clean-up crew and banker so that the developers can have a clean slate to work with.

"Real estate shouldn't fight you, but it's going to," he said. "Real estate is going to sell property whether it's historical or whether it's brand new.

Also, the Chamber of Commerce may have an interest in looking more into the future, even though the Chamber has been on record as supporting the historical past. I certainly don't want to knock the Chamber, but Chambers invariably are booster groups for progress."

He also suggested that the City appoint or elect a board to protect historical buildings.

"We have all agreed that we can have controlling factors about what can be residential and what can be commercial," he said. "Well, I see no reason if we're going to go that far in planning and in zoning that we couldn't carry the zoning code one step further and have historical resources on the zoning code.

"I have seen since I've been in Lawrence, good historic buildings, stone structures, tied with important persons of the past, torn down for apartment buildings; a higher and better use. In most cases, I think you can say that the higher and better use is greater economic yield. If that's what's going to be our motivation for things, totally, then we're in real trouble. We're in real trouble."

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Acknowledging the bald fact that our reasonable proposal for preservation will be ignored, we propose:

The creation, at the south end of the Kaw River Bridge, a landscaped garden and forest cut by complicated drives, a wilderness of deer and splashing bass, teeming with yogurt eaters, wild rice, jujube trees and all things good. Visitors and new residents would receive at the entry gate to Lawrence, a ticket book of free passes to Lawrence's finest--including the delicate crab quiche of the El-dridge, five free nights at Paul Gray's Jazz Place, a spicy lunch at the Royal Peking, a free record from Kief's, all you can drink for a night a Bugsy's and a free, slightly used car from Turner Chevy. There would be music, flutes and zithers and bongos to entertain daily in our 600-block Eden. There'd be weekly food orgies, courtesy of the Mercantile, with naked water bearers and belly dancers. Such exotic beauty to greet the newcomer.

We feel this proposal is at least as attractive as erecting a skyscraping Holiday Inn or a stone-faced Sears in the 600 block.

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