

Opinions

OUR VIEW

A new direction with MetroLink

In 1999, political leaders throughout St. Clair County believed in the economic development potential of the soon-to-open MetroLink line. Fairview Heights fought to get a stop built in the French Village area on the west end of town. Then Alderman Mark Kupsky said: "We could build something and maybe do a land-lease, maybe a bakery, dry cleaners, convenience store. ... The businesses would be designed around people using the MetroLink facility."

But related development hasn't sprung up as envisioned, in Fairview Heights or at other stops. Emerson Park is the one shining exception. Otherwise, MetroLink has produced little beyond park-and-ride lots.

Now 18 years later, Mayor Kupsky and the Fairview Heights City Council are taking a new run at making MetroLink an engine for revitalization.

The council recently approved the first steps for a tax increment finance district for the area; the plan is to attract convenience-oriented businesses first and apartments and condos later.

So many TIFs are created for projects that were going to happen anyway, but this TIF is true to the original intent. The area really is blighted, and clearly development isn't going to happen on its own.

Even creation of a TIF won't guarantee success. But it's encouraging to see city leaders work to turn wishful thinking into reality.