

**MAYOR'S NEWSLETTER
DECEMBER 2009**

I apologize for my long letter last month; this one may not be shorter, but I do want to cover some important points. First, I want to wrap up the trash can discussion by making everyone aware that City Council passed an ordinance in November allowing residents to use trash cans at the curb if that is their preference.

Second, I want to share some information regarding the proposed commuter rail line along the Highway 290 corridor and how this might affect Jersey Village. The traffic nightmare of 290 could be permanently resolved with our residents being the major beneficiaries. Jersey Village could become the transportation hub for northwest Harris County because it is the only location along the Hempstead route where the Beltway, Highway 290, the proposed Hempstead Tollway, FM 529 and Jones Road converge. As an incorporated city, Jersey Village is in the unique position of having the ability to zone, plan and control development within its city limits. The city could annex all or part of the ETJ south of 290, and establish development districts and codes to ensure that development in that area will meet the high standards desirable for sustainable development.

Let's go back and run through a brief history of the potential commuter rail project. In 2008, the Houston Galveston Area Council made a study of transportation issues and determined that commuter rail could easily be started along two existing corridors: one towards Galveston and one towards Hempstead. The idea was to use the existing railroad tracks and utilize commuter rail cars to transport people from the suburbs into Houston. County Judge Ed Emmott enthusiastically endorsed the idea because it is the easiest, least expensive and fastest to implement of all traffic congestion solutions. In addition to commuter rail, there are several other congestion solutions in this area that are being studied including a Hempstead Tollway, expansion of Highway 290 and improvements on Hempstead Road.

After City Council became aware of the possibility of a rail stop in Jersey Village, the members took a fact finding trip to Dallas to see three different developments in Richardson, Plano and Addison. Dallas is about ten years ahead of Houston in the development of their transit system, and it is proving to be popular with commuters and a positive attraction to suburban residents. Because of the congestion along Highway 290 and the continued demand for future development west and north of Jersey Village, the expectation is that commuter rail will be well received in northwest Harris County.

Following that trip we hired a consulting firm, Kimley-Horn, to perform a preliminary study to see if developing a commuter station in Jersey Village was feasible. The first stage of that study indicated that there is tremendous potential for retail, office, and residential development. The study also found that Jersey Village is well situated to be a transportation hub and it is the desirable distance from Houston to be the first stop on the Hempstead commuter line.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a term that refers to real estate development surrounding a public transportation station. There is an opportunity for Jersey Village to oversee TOD when the commuter rail comes through our city. The potential for development and the type of economic growth it can influence are enormous.

Real estate development could bring many high-end retail stores and restaurants nearby, and additional high-end residential housing options could be built within walking distance of the rail stop. All this would add to our tax base allowing the city to continue replacing failing infrastructure or lowering the tax burden of existing homeowners. It would also encourage some land owners to fully develop properties which are currently underdeveloped or are being used for undesirable activities.

None of this will happen overnight and it will require a lot of work by City Council for several years. There will also be some major decisions that citizens will need to consider and discuss; any annexation and establishment of Tax Investment Zones will require input and approval by Jersey Village residents. The possibility of a commuter rail line along the Hempstead corridor is exciting, and the potential for development in our city presents numerous opportunities. I will continue to update you on the actions of City Council as well as the progress on this issue.

