

49th and College Development: Part I

By Ashley Plummer

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The average American household drives 100 miles per day.

If that fact does not make you step back and think not only of your daily commutes and gas costs, but your carbon foot print as well, maybe it's time you thought about the toll it will take on the next generation. If you don't care about that, stop reading this.

While I may not be considered the "average American household," this fact did make me take a step back and look at how much I do drive on a daily basis. I thought about two things then—is it because I am lazy, or is it because of where I live (the southern end of the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood)? After much thought, I realized it wasn't necessarily one thing or the other. It was more that there was really nowhere (beyond the City Dog Bakery and the Paw Patch—can you tell I have a dog?) that I really desired to walk to. More often than not, it is so much easier for me to jump in my car and head five minutes north to Broad Ripple or 10 minutes south to downtown for food, entertainment or just a quick cup of coffee with a friend.

Then, I also realized that I do this all the time...and I also use that as the reason when people ask why I live where I live. I usually start by saying "I live in the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood, which is great because I have such a quick drive to both downtown and Broad Ripple."

Maybe I do drive more than I thought.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, at some point, to tell people "I live in the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood, one of the most walkable and community driven neighborhoods in Indianapolis. I live here because, similar to Broad Ripple and the Massachusetts Avenue area downtown, I never have to drive anywhere."

Believe it or not, one look at a map of our city streets will prove to anyone that the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood is the prime location for a pedestrian-driven and economically thriving community. In fact, the intersection at 49th St. and College Avenue lies right in the middle of not only the most densely populated area of the city, but also in the perfect location to realize what city planners at the turn of the 20th century realized—Indianapolis can be—and needs to be—a walkable city.

Over the past 60 or so years, the College Avenue corridor has become nothing much more than the route many people drive through to get from their far north homes to downtown and back again. However, when the city of Indianapolis annexed the land from Maple Road (now 38th St.) up to what was then the "town" of Broad Ripple, famous landscape architect George Kessler came in to redesign the area as part of his ambitious municipal plan which included networks of parks and boulevards to connect the area neighborhoods to the downtown heart of Indianapolis.

As the city continued to devote money to the area, roads vastly improved and a streetcar trolley system was constructed by the Indianapolis and Broad Ripple Transit Company. The turning point that headed directly north to Broad Ripple was the intersection at 49th and College. Beginning around this time and through the 1950s and 1960s, College Avenue, especially the intersection at 49th St., was home to numerous thriving businesses and services that provided for people from the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood.

After a population boom in the 1920s for the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood, growth continued at a slower pace in the 1930's as the neighborhood filled up, and the wealthy continued their northern migration beyond the city limits. The northern flight, which could be argued is the result of numerous social and economic invisible hands as well as personal decisions, continued (and continues...), but the obvious problem was that when the people moved, the businesses went with them. It can be argued today that almost every intersection on College Avenue south of 52nd Street has more vacant buildings and failed (or failing) businesses than it does open and thriving.

And to those of you currently trying to promote economic development in this



Gravestones of historic Broad Ripple figures can be found at Union Chapel Cemetery.

Union Chapel Cemetery website now available

By John D. Hague

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Union Chapel Cemetery has announced the establishment of an informational Website. This historic north-side cemetery with over 10,500 gravesites was established in 1823 and it is the burial location of many generations of Broad Ripple and northern Marion County residents. The new Website should be of interest to

Union Chapel Cemetery
8306 Union Chapel Road
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(317) 252-5883

www.unionchapelcemetery.com

readers who are interested in Broad Ripple history, local burial sites, and in family genealogy. The Website is located on the Internet at www.unionchapelcemetery.com.

The Union Chapel Website offers information about the history of the Cemetery; maps showing the location of the Cemetery

and the office, detailed maps of all of the sections of the Cemetery, fee schedules, decoration regulations, important dates, and a photographic tour of the Cemetery.

The Gazette will be running an article soon about the operations and grounds upgrading program that the Union Chapel Cemetery is implementing.

area—my hat goes off to you.

I decided to start writing for the Broad Ripple Gazette again when I saw that there was new discussion arising about potential development at the 49th and College intersection. After having discussions with community leaders and others, I realized that this discussion was not new—it had continued from the 2005 project beginning and private investors have now poured around \$4 million to date into research surrounding the redevelopment of the area. Basically, I have been asleep at the wheel.

But, I have been given that chance by the Gazette to write again—and for the next few issues, I will be writing about why it is so vital to our community (and the entire Broad Ripple community) that we convince our leaders that the "By Design" redevelopment of strategically located neighborhood corners should be one of our first priorities. With the incoming government funding that could potentially be provided by the Economic Stimulus, the time to let them know about community redevelopment is now.

Please stay tuned and continue reading. The idea of a walkable community for the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood could soon be a reality that would boost the economic standing not just for local businesses within the walkable grid, but for the residents and homeowners that have made the decision to call the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood their home.

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