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Opinion

Lot Lines: Underserved areas remain

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Over the past several years, retail developers largely have focused their efforts on building shopping centers in Edmond and northwest areas of Oklahoma City. Developers certainly were justified in building in these areas because of their containing high average incomes; however, there is one area that remains largely underserved that developers might want to consider for future retail projects.

The Midwest City and Del City area has seen a substantial amount of new retail construction over the past five years, but demographics show there is a need for additional retail and more shopping centers easily could be supported.

The new developments were met with incredible success, such as the 750,000-square-foot Town Center development in Midwest City, which has a vacancy of less than 5 percent. Additionally, the handful of new small strip centers built had their spaces quickly filled with new tenants or existing tenants relocating from older shopping centers.

One of the best examples of the strength of retail spending in this area is the Wal-Mart Supercenter that opened in Del City in 2006. Sources close to Wal-Mart said this store not only is one of the top revenue producers in the state for the Bentonville, Ark.-based retailer, but one of the top stores in the entire nation. As a result, this serves as a prime example of the retail potential for developers in Del City.

The primary difference between the retail trade potential of this area compared to northwest Oklahoma City and Edmond is the type of retailers that are needed. While demographics in the northern sections of Oklahoma County show the potential for more high-end retailers, this is not the case in Midwest City and Del City. The need in this area is for more moderately priced stores and discount retailers, such as Kohl's or Target.

Furthermore, this area has good leasing potential from existing tenants looking to relocate. There are a number of older shopping centers in both suburban cities with tenants who would like to upgrade their surroundings to a newer space if the location and price are right.

In addition to retailers, Midwest City and Del City are showing strong demand for casual dining restaurants. The restaurants that are part of the Town Center development continue to see steady crowds,

especially the Old Chicago restaurant. Old Chicago has quickly become one of the most popular restaurants in Midwest City, with long waits expected on most days during prime lunch and dinner hours. Additionally, local retail experts have said that many fast-food chains such as Braum's and McDonald's have reported some of their top-producing locations being in Midwest City and Del City.

Finally, the greatest lure for developers to this area is Midwest City's being home to the largest employer in the metro area, Tinker Air Force Base. The base has more than 26,000 workers, which is a number that developers cannot afford to ignore.

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