

FRI FAQ

Some people have different names for the area FRI refers to as “Frazier.” What are the boundaries, and why call it “Frazier”?

It’s often difficult to define neighborhood boundaries – for instance, people constantly disagree about what constitutes “Oak Cliff.” The area we call Frazier is part of South Dallas/Fair Park. It encompasses many smaller neighborhoods such as Bertrand, Dolphin Heights and what many residents call “East Dallas.” The boundaries are Fitzhugh Avenue, Haskell Avenue, White Rock Creek, Scyene Road and Robert B. Cullum Boulevard.

The area takes its name from Julia C. Frazier Elementary School and the Frazier Courts public housing project. Both of them are named for Julia C. Frazier, a dedicated and highly respected African-American teacher who was the first woman to serve as the principal of a high school in Dallas ISD.

If Frazier has so much economic potential, why not just leave redevelopment to the free market?

It is very costly to build new homes or other projects in older neighborhoods such as Frazier. Many properties are owned by heirs of the original owners, who may not even be aware of their ownership. Other properties are vacant or abandoned, and the owners may be difficult to locate. That drives up the cost of building something here, and most developers are unwilling to invest the extra time and money up front.

FRI was created largely to do that “pre-development” work. By acquiring land – especially by putting together several adjacent parcels in key locations – FRI literally lays the groundwork for for-profit builders to undertake the new projects that will benefit the community. In turn, as a partner in those projects, FRI can ensure that they do reflect what residents want.

How can FRI afford to do the work that other builders can’t?

Because FRI is a not-for-profit organization, funded largely by grants and donations, it can do the work other builders can’t or won’t do. This same model has been followed with great success in other cities, in neighborhoods that present similar challenges.

What’s the difference between “revitalization” and “gentrification”?

Gentrification is what happens when economic forces make a low-income neighborhood suddenly attractive to builders who cater to affluent people. In Dallas, the prime example is “Uptown,” where builders bought out the residents of historic State-Thomas, tore down their homes, built high-end apartments and condos and even gave the area a new name.

Revitalization is what can happen when an organization such as FRI participates in the process. A big part of FRI's mission is to protect the interests of low-income residents, making sure there is a place for them even while some new, more affluent residents move in. FRI specifically requires that the homes built on the land it assembles are affordable to people of many income levels. The goal is to create a neighborhood that is economically integrated. We believe everyone is better off when that is the case.

Who really benefits from FRI's work?

The most immediate beneficiaries will be the people who live in the new housing Frazier and its partners build and the people who receive job training through Frazier's economic development partnerships. Other area residents will benefit from having more shopping opportunities and a safer, more sustainable neighborhood.

As a nonprofit, FRI pays salaries and benefits to its employees and hires contractors to do other work – those individuals certainly benefit in that way. But, by law, there are no owners or stockholders to profit from any of FRI's activities. Any money FRI earns – for instance, by selling the homes it builds – is immediately re-invested back into its work of making the community better.

FRI has existed for several years. Why hasn't there been more visible change before now?

As noted above, FRI's major task is to acquire land and make it available to builders who will build projects that benefit the community. For the reasons we described, that is a difficult and time-consuming process. FRI has made lots of progress in the past four years, buying dozens of properties that were vacant or in a condition that made them a threat rather than an asset to the community. But that progress, although real, is hard to spot.

Unfortunately, our most visible contribution to date, the beautiful model home on Silver Street, was completed just as the national economy, and particularly the real estate market, went into steep decline. FRI, like all organizations involved in building homes, has felt the effects of that downturn. As the flow of capital dried up and demand for housing fell, FRI adjusted just as other builders did, by delaying planned projects. We aren't going away, and we certainly haven't given up our plans. We will resume building single family homes just as soon as it is possible and sensible to do so.

When will we begin to see visible change?

FRI expects to break ground in late 2010 or early 2011 on a truly revolutionary new development at the corner of Scyene and Hatcher, across from the new DART station. This \$30 million project, built in partnership with McCormack Baron Salazar, will include rental units for people in a wide variety of income categories, for-sale townhomes and approximately 25,000 square feet of commercial space. It will not be a copy of Mockingbird Station – instead, it will be designed to fit the neighborhood. But we are confident that, as the first mixed-use, transit-oriented development in southern Dallas, it will have the same kind of major positive impact that Mockingbird Station had on its neighborhood.

What is Don Williams' role in FRI? Doesn't he fund it and therefore control it?

FRI would never have come into being without Don Williams. He created the Foundation for Community Empowerment, which created FRI. Over the years, Don has donated very significant sums to both FCE and FRI. However, Don recognizes that to be sustainable and to fulfill its mission as a community-centered organization, FRI must get its financial support from a variety of sources. His support, while not insignificant, currently accounts for a fraction of FRI's budget. The bulk of our funding comes from government and foundation grants and other private contributions.

Don serves on FRI's board, but as of 2010 he is no longer co-chair. He maintains a passionate commitment to the welfare of South Dallas/Fair Park, and he remains a valued friend and advisor. However, he does not control FRI's decisions or actions.