

Curbside class on 88th

A bus stop brightens a neighborhood

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The People Mover bus stop on 88th Avenue near Jewel Lake Road used to be, in winter, a desolate spot on an icy, tilted snowbank next to the Trophy Lounge.

It wasn't top of the list for repairs this year, but when a Jewel Lake church lobbied the city to fix it up, the People Mover jumped on it. They built not only a better bus stop, but an attractive pedestrian island and sidewalk.

They turned blight into beauty -- and demonstrated how one improvement can change the tone and feel of a neighborhood.

Not only was the old bus stop unattractive, but there was no sidewalk, and no street lights, says People Mover project manager Randy Bergt.

Few people got on the bus there, though 88th is filled with apartment buildings.

"The other bus stop was so big and ugly I think it discouraged people," Bergt said.

Since the new stop was finished, the number of riders boarding and getting off there has already been on the increase, he said: "It's a 'you build it and they will come' sort of deal."

The stop is an island of safety in what used to be solid parking lot and driveway for the Holiday gas station on the corner, and an old mall containing the Trophy Lounge and a bowling alley. There's a bench and two hanging street lights. "With the lights on, it would really knock your socks off," said Bergt.

Besides the stop itself, People Mover built a sidewalk to the intersection of Jewel Lake and 88th to connect with a crosswalk. And the city had to tear up and replace part of the parking lot.

This bus stop is admittedly more expensive than most, at \$90,000, but a lot of work needed to be done to make it safe, said Bergt. The city gets federal grants, with a local contribution required, to fix bus stops.

The Gloria Dei Lutheran Church at 84th and Jewel Lake first called the city's attention to the bad bus stop last March. Members of the church visited households in the area and heard repeatedly that crime and traffic at 88th and Jewel Lake were a problem, said the Rev. Scott Fuller. They thought improving the bus stop would be a good first step.

As it happened, owners of the mall on that corner also repainted this summer, adding to the fresh look of the area.

Meantime, Gloria Dei is looking for other neighborhood projects. Break-ins are a big concern, said Fuller. His church alone has been broken into five times since January, and other churches on Jewel Lake have also reported break-ins.

Stopping break-ins might not be as easy as getting the city to move a project up the list. But it's good for the community that the church is trying.

BOTTOM LINE: The 88th Avenue bus stop is an example of the kind of improvements that make better neighborhoods.

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