

## NEIGHBORHOODS

# Frayser gets \$1.3 million grant to build community

By Tom Bailey, Daily Memphian

Updated: July 15, 2020 1:22 PM CT | Published: July 15, 2020 1:12 PM CT



Memphis muralist Jamond Bullock (signing as Alive Paint) recently completed this mural on the side of the Superlo Foods building on North Watkins at Frayser Boulevard. (Tom Bailey/Daily Memphian)

The Frayser community is getting a \$1.3 million grant from the MassMutual Foundation to support small businesses, help Frayser families save money, improve communication among residents and carry out ideas of a soon-to-form community advisory board.

Called “Frayser Connect,” the Frayser Community Development Corp. will coordinate the effort in collaboration with Epicenter Memphis and the RISE Foundation.

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[Amazon jobs, wages could make big impact in Raleigh, Frayser](#)

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Epicenter supports entrepreneurship across Memphis and RISE Foundation supports low-income residents with a variety of financial and other programming.

Frayser residents themselves, led by a new advisory board, will be asked to design an initiative for supporting small businesses in the community.



This blighted, long-vacant commercial building, which once housed a Whataburger, contrasts with the ideals of a new mural painted recently by Jamond Bullock on the side of the Superlo Foods at North Watkins and Frayser Boulevard. (Tom Bailey/Daily Memphian)

The initiative includes creating a “connector” for training, jobs, financial savings and counseling.

Frayser Connect will include a program to help families save money. Every dollar they save will be matched by \$2, up to a \$3,000 grant total. Families can use the savings for such expenses as college tuition, to help buy a house or car, or to support their business.

In the U.S., 80% of people live from paycheck to paycheck, Alli Mathias, vice president of the MassMutual Foundation, said during an online press conference on Wednesday, July 15, announcing the grant and Frayser Connect.

“Forty percent of adults faced with a \$400 expense can’t pay it or have to sell something or borrow money to cover the cost,” she said. And 60 percent of families must borrow money to cover basic living expenses.

“That means people are going into debt just to put food on the table,” she said, adding that the pandemic has only created more financial stress.

Too often, philanthropic efforts are disconnected or uninformed about the wants and needs of residents those efforts are meant to serve, Mathias said.

“We asked, what can we do differently to help,” she said.

Frayser anchors the northwest area of Memphis. The community stretches from the Mississippi River on the west to New Allen Road on the east, from the Loosahatchie River on the north to I-40 on the south.

The MassMutual Insurance Co. established the MassMutual Foundation.

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[Longtime neighborhood director stepping down later this year](#)

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**This business at 2274 Frayser Blvd. has closed and the space is available for lease.** (Tom Bailey/Daily Memphian)

In a prepared statement, MassMutual Foundation president Dennis Duquette said, “... We are thrilled to help bring these important resources together to launch Frayser Connect.

“Working with Frayser CDC, Epicenter, and our longtime partner RISE Foundation, along with the residents of Frayser, we are excited for this next step in building stronger community connections and charting a path to better economic and financial opportunity for all,” Duquette said.

The Frayser CDC has been working with the MassMutual Foundation and local organizations for more than a year to structure Frayser Connect, said Steve Lockwood, Frayser CDC executive director.

Success will depend on residents’ participation to establish new communication tools within and outside the community, and build a platform for Frayser’s “community voice to drive systemic change,” Lockwood said in a release.

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[Negotiations underway with potential grocer for \\$16 million Frayser Gateway](#)



**An empty commercial building at 2062 Frayser Blvd.** (Tom Bailey/Daily Memphian)

Epicenter will bring training and other resources to Frayser small businesses.

And advisory board comprising a cross-section of Frayser residents and stakeholders will be established to guide Frayser Connect.

Frayser residents will be recruited to work in paid positions for Frayser Connect.

The advisory board will identify neighborhood projects and small businesses that will receive grants and loans.

The next steps: The Frayser Connect advisory committee will be formed; potential sites will be identified to put a “Connect Center,” which will be a hub for entrepreneurial and small business activities; key Frayser Connect staff will be hired; and participants for RISE Foundation’s “Save Up Frayser” financial education orientation program will be recruited.

The financial education orientation will be Friday, July 17, and virtual classes will start **July 23**.