

To Our University Community:

Today you may have heard news reports about the supposed “collapse” of our effort to build a new home for our world-renowned Conservatory of Music and Dance.

Our response: To paraphrase a famous quote, reports of the death of our UMKC Conservatory project are greatly exaggerated.

It is no secret that we have been facing headwinds since we lost a state match this past summer. But UMKC, and our array of civic and community partners, have not been deterred. We recognize how vital this project is to our university, to our wonderful Kansas City arts community and its contributions to our quality of life, and to economic development in our urban core.

Our message to our community, and to you, is straightforward: Together, we will make this happen.

As we move forward, however, it is also appropriate to take a step back and look at the bigger picture of the state of UMKC, the UM System, and higher education in Kansas City and in Missouri. It is time for a reckoning. Over the next few weeks and months, the people of Kansas City, and the state of Missouri, need to make fundamental decisions about our future – for our sake, and even more so, for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

The fate of the new conservatory does not exist in a vacuum. It is a key component of a bigger picture that includes our community’s ability to support the growth of our burgeoning engineering and technology sector, our ability to compete for major employers such as Amazon and Apple, our support for entrepreneurship, the vital task of improving urban education, and maintaining the quality of life that has thrust our community into a favorable national spotlight in recent years.

We have reached a crossroads. Do we continue to invest in growth? Or do we limit ourselves to stagnation and decline?

Several observers have pointed to declining public support for higher education as a key factor in the decision by Amazon not to include Kansas City or Missouri in its list of finalist sites for a new headquarters. That decline is real, and it has severe impacts.

Beyond the loss of the \$48 million state match for the Conservatory, budget cuts from the state over the past three years amount to \$12.6 million for UMKC, \$70.6 million for the UM System. These cuts come after more than a decade of flat state appropriations that did not account for either inflation or enrollment growth.

At UMKC and in the UM System, we are doing our part. We are reviewing our academic portfolio to make sure we are providing quality programs at the lowest possible cost, reconfiguring our administrative operations to improve efficiency wherever possible, and have many other projects underway aimed at securing our future.

We are doing the painful work necessary to be better stewards of this public research university that is so critical to the economy and quality of life in the Greater Kansas City region. This community must recognize, however, that we can’t continue to drain resources from UMKC and higher education and expect a positive future for our citizens, and greatness for our city and state.

If our leaders want to deliver on promises of a better future, they must realize that higher education is not an expense, but an investment – the only investment they can make that will deliver better jobs, better health, growth and progress.

We greatly appreciate the strong support we have enjoyed, on this project and others, from our friends in the legislature. They need allies in their ranks, and a show of support from the public, for that support to continue. That’s how members of our university community can help. If we are to have any hope of achieving the future to which we say we aspire, we must resolve to make that investment.

Respectfully,

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