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New Drexel president Fry wants to strengthen neighborhood

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When I interview a relatively new CEO or president, one of the first things I usually ask them is how, if at all, what they found when they took the job is different from what they thought they'd find.

I asked [Drexel University](#) President John Fry that in an interview I did for a story in today's [Business Journal](#). I didn't have room to include his answer in the story, but I thought it was interesting.

Fry was an executive vice president at the [University of Pennsylvania](#) from 1995 until 2002, when he left to become president of Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster.

F&M, he said, had a lot of alumni in Philadelphia and when he came to see them, he visited the people he had gotten to know during his time at Penn.

As a result, he said, "there have been no surprises ... in terms of what's happened in and around this area; the direction the region's going in."

What did surprise Fry was that the area north of Powelton Village, the neighborhood adjoining Drexel, hadn't shared in the growth that had taken place in other parts of University City.

"I remember going out and beginning to drive around and look for myself and feeling this is a shame that that same level of investment hadn't yet found its way into those neighborhoods," he said.

Fry thinks that's because Drexel's growth in enrollment under his predecessor, Constantine Papadakis, outstripped the amount of development the university was able to do for its students on and around its campus, both in terms of housing and

retail amenities.

“My feeling is that if Drexel really wants to take its part as a major investor in those neighborhoods and in our surrounding West Philadelphia community, part of what it has to do is look at its own campus development and think about how it’s going to create more capacity to absorb its growth and at the same time, and this is where [vice provost] Lucy [Kerman] comes in, putting in place a series of initiatives and investments into the neighborhood to strengthen it,” Fry said.

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