

Oklahoma City MAPS out big plans

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A \$777 million MAPS 3 plan unveiled by Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett on Thursday certainly matches the ambition of its predecessors.

Now it's up to Oklahoma City voters to determine whether the plan matches their own ideas for Oklahoma City's future.

City council members are expected to vote Tuesday to put MAPS 3 on the ballot Dec. 8.

The plan unveiled Thursday by Cornett and council members includes a massive downtown park, a new convention center, transit improvements such as a downtown streetcar and commuter rail system, Oklahoma River improvements, renovations at State Fair Park, health and wellness aquatic centers for senior citizens, 57 new miles of bicycle and pedestrian trails and money for new sidewalks.

It would establish a 1-cent sales tax for seven years. The tax would go into effect April 1 as the current temporary 1-cent sales tax funding Ford Center improvements expires. The sales tax rate would not change.

Cornett said it is a mistake for anyone to assume voters will rubber-stamp MAPS 3 because of the name it carries. Voters have approved two previous MAPS proposals.

"The city is just so fundamentally different from the past MAPS initiatives. I don't think they are much of a guide for us," Cornett said. "I think the citizens are going to look at this with a very discerning eye. Each of these projects is going to have to stand on its own."

In 2007, the city conducted an Internet survey asking people if the city should go forward with a MAPS 3 and what the plan should include. The response overwhelmingly supported a MAPS 3. Including MAPS 3 and other city initiatives, 12 of the top 14 ideas cited in the survey will have been addressed.

"I would say transit and the park are the two things that this city most lacks," Cornett said. "This addresses that, but it also does a whole lot more. We've been listening to the voters. This is what we think they are telling us."

Filling the 'gap'

Cornett has compared the downtown park to Discovery Park in Houston, Millennium Park in Chicago and Centennial Park in Atlanta. It would serve as a central gathering spot for downtown events and a green space connecting the Oklahoma River and

downtown after the Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway is relocated.

"We know that with the transformation of I-40, we are going to have a big empty gap there," Ward 7 Councilman Skip Kelly said. "Now we have a large common area for everyone, including visitors to the city."

Other projects will stretch beyond downtown, including \$40 million for new bicycling and walking trails and \$50 million for aquatic centers.

"I think we have something in the package for all our citizens," Ward 6 Councilwoman Meg Salyer said. "A little bit unlike MAPS 1, we've reached out to the whole city."

City leaders now have less than three months to convince voters the plan is worth their sales tax dollars.

Cornett said the city has kept its promises on previous MAPS proposals and will be diligent with MAPS 3, as well.

"I do think we have some level of voter confidence," Cornett said. "But we want that same level of confidence to be passed on to future city leaders."



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