

HOME	COMMUNITY	NEWS	ENTERTAINMENT	GOVERNMENT	EDUCATION	HEALTH	SPORTS	FAITH	OPINION
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Home > Government > City > City gains environmental, economic awards from MAPS process

# City gains environmental, economic awards from MAPS process



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The envisioned park area that could result if voters approve MAPS 3. Graphic provided.

Voters have been told that MAPS 3 would create a 70-acre park, a rail streetcar system and new convention center downtown, trails and sidewalks throughout the city, state fairgrounds improvements, wellness aquatic centers for senior citizens and upgrades to facilities on the Oklahoma River at the heart of the metro area.

Those projects are music to the ears of some; others believe the economy is too battered, and the funds would be better spent on items such as historic preservation, public safety or infrastructure. Each camp is equally passionate about the validity of their positions. Election day looms on Dec. 8.

"I think people lose perspective on how fiscally responsible we've made sure this whole package is," said Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett in an interview with The City Sentinel. "We spent a tremendous amount of time

over the last three years doing research and due diligence. There were a lot of good ideas, but these are the eight that address job creation and quality of life best.

"The studies that we've seen showing how low our unemployment numbers are than the rest of the country, how much better our economy is. That's because we've been willing to invest in ourselves."

There is noteworthy news that may not have been passed on so widely, concerning the transformational impact of MAPS programs.

Recently, the National Brownfields Conference in New Orleans awarded MAPS two 2009 national commendations -- one for its multi-billion dollar economic impact, and a second for bringing blighted areas back to life.

"In a time of economic upheaval and downtrending, the City of Oklahoma City's Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) provides a stellar example of what can be done to revitalize cities and bring back new growth and life to what was formerly a struggling major metropolitan area," said Therese Carpenter, environmental scientist and one of eight Renewal judges.

MAPS architects say other cities can benefit from studying the program and to perhaps modeling its implementation and theories. If voters trust Oklahoma City leaders again, they believe citizens won't be disappointed.

The proposal continues the momentum and what many consider a renaissance of the last 15 years, city leaders past and present say.

City-commissioned economic studies place the value of new investment projects related to MAPS at more than \$5 billion.

A few of the particulars cited follow: MAPS funds built the Bricktown Ballpark, Ford Center, Ronald J. Norick downtown library and the Bricktown canal. Then, in MAPS for Kids, the process provided critical updates to public education, not only in Oklahoma City but also in neighboring districts. The process also renovated the Cox Convention Center, State Fairgrounds, Civic Center Music Hall and the North Canadian (now the Oklahoma) River.

Nearly \$200 million worth of private sector capital investment has occurred in the hotel sector; there are now seven significant hotels in the city's core, compared to one before MAPS passed.

Downtown Oklahoma City's population grew by more than 1,500 residents between 2000 and 2008, due to the \$238 million in investment in housing and mixed-use structures. In 2008, about 2.9 million people visited Bricktown, and property values in the area have nearly quadrupled.

The Oklahoma City Museum of Art, SONIC Corporate Headquarters, Devon Energy's new 50-story tower and the acquisition of the Seattle Supersonics NBA team (now the Oklahoma City Thunder) have all been linked to the success of MAPS, among many others entities, either directly or indirectly.

Cornett hopes voters see what MAPS has done, and what it can continue to do if approved Dec. 8.

Ultimately, MAPS architects believe a positive vote outcome will make believers out of doubters, placing Oklahoma City shoulder-to-shoulder as we compete with other destination localities.

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