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Brighter future for city possible with MAPS 3

OUR VIEWS VOTE YES IN TUESDAY'S ELECTION

The Oklahoman Editorial Comments  65

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OKLAHOMA City's residents could easily pat themselves on the back for their past investments in MAPS and MAPS for Kids, declare that we've arrived as a city and call it a job well done. Doing so guarantees the city stagnates or, even worse, loses much of the progress gained on the economic development and quality-of-life fronts.

When voters on Tuesday consider a temporary penny sales tax to fund the MAPS 3 projects, they should look forward. They should vote yes.

Leading the list of eight projects is a convention center to help the city build on the convention business that's grown exponentially since passage of the original MAPS in 1993, creating jobs and revenue for the city. The \$280 million building would replace the aging and antiquated Cox Convention Center.

At \$130 million each, a downtown streetcar system and world-class park are projects that would make the downtown area even more exciting and appealing. The streetcar system is a step toward better public transportation for city residents and visitors. The 70-acre central park would help join the downtown and Oklahoma River areas and provide a venue for numerous activities.

With passage of MAPS 3, the river will see improvements to make it more amenable to competitive and recreational events. The \$60 million in upgrades includes development of a public whitewater kayaking facility. For the same amount, the MAPS 3 tax would pay for a badly needed facelift for some of State Fair Park's aging buildings and the consolidation of some outdated facilities.

Senior citizens will benefit from a \$50 million effort to build as many as five health and wellness aquatic centers. The plan is part of a larger, health-focused effort to improve the well-being of city residents that includes \$40 million to build 57 miles of new trails that will link with existing trails, and \$10 million for sidewalks in high-traffic areas and near libraries and schools.

It's worth remembering that the city has an impressive recent history with managing massive projects, including the original MAPS work and the much more widespread and nuanced work that's ongoing as part of MAPS for Kids. This hasn't stopped opponents from spreading misinformation about MAPS 3. So let's clear the air.

Myth: Passage of MAPS in 1993 created a continuous sale tax increase in place ever since.

Fact: The 1-cent sales tax increase created by MAPS expired in 1999 and remained off the books until the start of the MAPS for Kids tax in 2002. When that expired, voters supported continuation with a temporary tax to renovate the Ford Center.

Myth: Previous MAPS votes primarily benefited only Bricktown and downtown.

Fact: The original MAPS had two Bricktown components, the ballpark and the canal. The only MAPS for Kids-related downtown/Bricktown components were for physical improvements at downtown-area schools and the possible construction of a downtown elementary school. MAPS raised money for the Ford Center, renovation of the former Myriad Convention Center and construction of a new downtown library. Money raised by MAPS for Kids was spread throughout the Oklahoma City school district and nearly two dozen surrounding districts. MAPS funding has gone toward the fairgrounds, Civic Center Music Hall and development of the Oklahoma River waterfront.

Myth: Hard economic times are inappropriate for local tax initiatives.

Fact: Some of Oklahoma City's most enduring structures were built during the Great Depression. The original MAPS was passed after a decade-long slump that began during the post-1980 oil bust. Voters approved MAPS for Kids just two months after 9/11. The Ford Center tax was passed when the national economic downturn was clearly evident.

Myth: Oklahoma City has an adequate convention center. A new one isn't needed.

Fact: The existing convention center was designed as more of an arena and isn't adequate to attract the size of conventions for which similar-sized cities compete. The absence of central city hotels once made attracting conventions difficult. The problem now is the size and status of the convention center.

Myth: MAPS 3 would create a light rail system for the benefit of a few tourists.

Fact: MAPS 3 has no light rail component. It does include the start of a downtown streetcar system such as the ones already in place in smaller cities including Little Rock, Ark. The system would be used by downtown workers, downtown residents and visitors alike and could serve as the first phase of a regional transit plan.

Myth: The recreational aspects of MAPS 3 would benefit only a small group of residents and visitors.

Fact: That would be true only if you consider as "small" all the senior citizens, people who walk, jog and bicycle on trails, kids who walk to schools and libraries and, yes, the local and visiting teams of rafting, rowing and kayaking enthusiasts for which Oklahoma City has become a nationally known venue. Also in this supposedly "small" group are the thousands of people who attend one or more events at the fairgrounds during the year.

Myth: The city is neglecting street repairs in favor of the MAPS 3 projects.

Fact: Two years ago, city residents passed an \$835.5 million bond issue, including nearly \$500 million for street improvements.


Here's another fact worth remembering: Oklahoma City's future can be brighter, more prosperous than its past. Voters have the chance Tuesday to make that happen.

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Christmas clothing spree: Friday, Dec. 4,
Photos from a shopping spree on Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

5 photos



Del City apartments demolished: Friday,
Photos from the demolition of the Kristie Manor Apartments in Del City, which have been

10 photos



Sarah Palin book signing in Norman
View photos from Sarah Palin's book signing at Hastings in Norman.

8 photos



Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting
The Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting events at the Oklahoma state Capitol in Oklahoma City, Tuesday,

12 photos