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Whitewater Center Part of MAPS III

Proponents Applaud It as Additional Advantage of Projects

12/04/09

W. ORLANDO PIERCE

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A new whitewater center for the Oklahoma River is being applauded by proponents of MAPS III as an additional reason why voters should vote to approve the proposals on Tuesday, Dec. 8.

An approval by voters of the \$777 million group of projects will not raise taxes, proponents say, since MAPS III calls for a continuation of a penny sales tax adopted by voters for MAPS for Kids, which is scheduled to expire.

MAPS III programs include the building of a park in downtown Oklahoma City similar to that of Houston, Texas.

A new rail-based transit project is also part of MAPS III, as well as improvements of State Fair Park, a new convention center and other ventures.

"The improvements that will be made at the Oklahoma River and a whitewater course there," Marcus Elwell, a spokesman for the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, said, "will prove to be one of the most exciting parts of MAPS III."

About \$60 million will be used to make the improvements at the Oklahoma River.

Approximately \$35 million will go to make improvements that would enhance the quality of the rowing venue at the river, Mr. Elwell said, "making the city the premier urban site for river sports."

He emphasized, too, that a recreation center would also be created that would "become the only permanently lighted venue in the world."

"Already, since the adoption of MAPS, thousands of youths have been introduced to water sports through an outreach program," the spokesman said.

"Those efforts have made it possible for three local schools (U.S. Grant, Capitol Hill and Northwest Classen High Schools) to launch their own rowing teams this fall," Mr. Elwell said.

The addition of a whitewater center at the river (as MAPS III will allow) will make the Oklahoma River even more accessible to young people, the chamber of commerce spokesman said.

"The new whitewater center will offer rafting, kayaking and

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canoeing for all skill levels," Michael Knopp, executive director of the Oklahoma City Boathouse Foundation, said, "from beginner right up to elite athlete."

The foundation has sponsored youth outreach programs involving the Oklahoma River.

"This facility will give our youths even more ways to get active and experience water sports in the heart of the city," Mr. Knopp continued.

In addition to the man-made, re-circulating river, the center will have a zip line course, a pulley and cable system suspended above the water to give riders a bird's eye view of the rapids.

"When you give kids the opportunity to discover they can succeed in athletics in sports where nobody sits on the bench," Mr. Knopp remarked, "that they can do more physically than they realized, the results will make a profound difference in their lives."

He pointed out that those "results" will be "added self-confidence, discipline and a willingness to try something new."

"That's the gift that water sports give," Mr. Knopp went on, barely able to contain his excitement, "and that is why we want to give as many young people as possible the opportunity to get on the water."

"Sometimes all it takes to make a change for the better is opportunity," Mr. Elwell, the chamber of commerce spokesman, said.

"The Oklahoma River can be an even stronger catalyst of change for the city if MAPS III is passed next week," he stated, "creating even more opportunities for our youths and families to get active outdoors."



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