

Plan offers city chance to continue moving ahead

OUR VIEWS: MAPS 3 PROPOSAL

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THE original Metropolitan Area Projects, or MAPS, transformed Oklahoma City and helped provide tremendous momentum as the 21st century dawned. Oklahoma City residents are expected to decide later this year whether they want to see that momentum continue.

Mayor Mick Cornett and city leaders unveiled plans Thursday for MAPS 3 (the second MAPS project focused on revitalizing our public schools), an ambitious proposal that, among other things, calls for building a new convention center and creating a large park downtown. The cost: \$777 million (including \$17 million in contingency funds), to be paid for with a 1-cent sales tax that would last nearly eight years.

That's serious money, but the package presents a serious opportunity for Oklahoma City to keep moving forward. As we see it, staying put isn't an option.

MAPS, a penny sales tax approved by voters in 1993, gave us nine projects including the Bricktown Ballpark, our downtown canal, the Oklahoma River, a sparkling new library and the Ford Center. The Ford Center now houses a National Basketball Association team; the Oklahoma River has become a U.S. Olympic training site for rowers; restaurants, bars and clubs have sprung up along the canal. In all, more than \$2 billion in private investment has resulted from MAPS.

How much might be generated by this next step?

A new facility is badly needed if Oklahoma City is to compete for the kinds of conventions that bring millions of dollars annually to larger cities. That was borne out earlier this year in a study commissioned by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber. Consultants said new business would surely follow if a new convention center were built.

We're excited about the prospect of a 70-acre downtown park, which would stretch from downtown to the Oklahoma River. The park would provide visitors and residents alike with a unique destination in the city.

The MAPS 3 proposal includes funding for a rail-based streetcar system downtown, improvements to the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds, 57 miles of bicycling and walking trails, additional sidewalks throughout the city, enhancements to the Oklahoma River and wellness/aquatic centers for senior citizens.

A December vote is expected. If approved by voters, the MAPS 3 tax would take effect April 1, as the current 1-cent tax to fund Ford Center improvements expires.

The list of projects was finalized after months of work by Cornett and others. They believe, as we do, that the projects represent a good and necessary next step in the city's continuing evolution. As the mayor said Thursday, "I think it recognizes the needs of the world-class city we are becoming, and I think it will capture our imaginations."



Oklahoma State Fair: Sunday, September 20,
The 2009 Oklahoma State Fair at State Fair Park in Oklahoma City on Sunday, Sept. 20, 2009. By John

8 photos



Latin-style dance lessons precede the
View photos from the event.

7 photos



Oklahoma State Fair: Thursday, September
The Oklahoma State Fair at State Fair Park in Oklahoma City, Thursday, September 17, 2009.

11 photos



Edmond Memorial High School Homecoming
View photos of the parade.

11 photos