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MAPS 3 park could be first for Oklahoma City

BY BRYAN DEAN Comments  65

Published: November 15, 2009



A couple examines artwork in Discovery Green Park Nov. 7 in downtown Houston. Oklahoma City leaders have compared the proposed MAPS 3 downtown park to Discovery Green, which opened last year. PHOTO BY STEVE CAMPBELL, PROVIDED BY THE GREATER OKLAHOMA CITY CHAMBER

HOUSTON — The \$130 million downtown park included in the \$777 million MAPS 3 proposal isn't a park like Oklahoma City residents would recognize.

Yes, it would have a playground, walking trails and athletic fields.

But the concept of a "highly programmed" urban park is a new one for Oklahoma City, and the best way to understand it is to look at similar parks in other cities, Mayor Mick Cornett said.

The Oklahoman recently visited Discovery Green Park in Houston. The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber planned the trip, but *The Oklahoman* paid its own way. The planned MAPS 3 park would be bigger than the 12-acre Houston park, but would have many similar features and was designed by the same company, Hargreaves and

Associates.

Houston resident Henry Edgar, who took his beagles, Reagan and Gen. George S. Patton, to the Discovery Green Park on Nov. 7 said Oklahoma City residents will have to change the way they think of a park.

"You have to start thinking in terms of Disney World," Edgar said. "There are so many things to do here. You almost have to plan your visit."

About Discovery Green

Model boats can be rented and piloted around a pond. In the winter, the pond is changed into an ice-skating rink.

Two different amphitheatres featured musicians playing live music most of the day. A couple dozen people took part in a morning yoga class. Parents watched as their kids exercised in a childrens' fitness class. Dogs ran in an off-leash gated area while their owners sat on benches.

In many small tents, a person could learn to fix a bicycle, talk about recycling or buy miniature doughnuts that taste like a New Orleans beignet. A cafe serves quick food like burgers, hot dogs and salads.

"They have a lot of stuff here," said Jim Campbell of Clear Lake, Texas, who brought his two children to the park. "It's a simple, cheap way to spend a day together. We wouldn't come here if there weren't so many things to do."

The three played catch with a football on the park's lawn before lunch.

Oklahoma City plans even bigger

Oklahoma City's downtown park would be 70 acres and would include many of the same activities found in Discovery Green — model boats, amphitheatres, a large playground, a dog park, restaurants, public art and gardens. The MAPS 3 park would have room for athletic fields and green areas with walking and biking trails. The north border would be a boulevard set to replace the current Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway in 2014.

The park would be split into two sections, one between the boulevard to the relocated I-40 and the other from the new I-40 to the north bank of the Oklahoma River.

The two sections would be connected with the Skydance Bridge, a pedestrian bridge with an artistic design. The city began buying up land in the area as part of the Core to Shore program, which began several years ago when city leaders realized the relocated I-40 would give them the opportunity to link downtown with the Oklahoma River.

Cornett said the ultimate goal is to duplicate the types of programs held at Discovery Green every weekend.

"We're not trying to build another park," Cornett said. "We are trying to build our first ever truly urban park that's highly programmed; that will become, I think, a traditional

gathering place for our community for generations to come.”

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