

Over and Out. Police and fire department layoffs and pay cuts are done, but what happened? Page 14

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Kiss the Cartoon

Theme weddings might not be the most popular option in Tulsa, but they're definitely out there. Page 19

Suddenly, Respectability

Hello, it's been there, but now that the gentry have discovered it, can the old, warehouse district stay hip?

BY MIKE EASTERLING

Developers, merchants, artists and others who have been engaged for the past year and a half in plotting the future of the Brady District on the north side of downtown Tulsa finally provided a look at their work on Feb. 4, unveiling a plan they hope will make the area one of the nation's premier arts and entertainment destinations.

The event, which took place at Living ArtSpace Tulsa in the heart of the district, was essentially the midpoint of what is envisioned by planners and supporters as a three-year process from start to finish. They hope to transform the Brady—now officially the Brady Arts District—from a warehouse and industrial area, as it has been for much of its existence, into a haven for art galleries, restaurants, nightclubs, theaters and other cultural and entertainment attractions, all anchored by a 2.76-acre park called the Brady Town Square and highlighted by an ambitious streetscaping project.

Much of that transformation already has taken place, with a number of such ventures currently operating. Jeff Stava, chief operating officer of the Tulsa Community Foundation, and one of the principles involved in the planning process, believes the pioneers and long-suffering of the district are poised to reap a fit harvest.

"You're starting to see private developers put money in it," he said. "We're at that tipping point."

Stava has lofty expectations for what the plan might accomplish.

"I think it's going to transform Greenwood and the Brady," he said. "It's going to have the potential to have a ripple effect on the whole northern part of downtown, even impact the Blue Dome."

The small-area plan that organizers have put together for the Brady is intended to serve as an amendment to the PLANITULSA process and the update of the city's comprehensive plan. It will need to wind through the city's regular approval process—the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and the City Council—before it can be implemented, which could take several months.

But Theron Warlick, a city planner who spoke at last week's event, spoke glowingly of the plan.

"I think it's terrific," he said. "It's doing exactly what we have heard Tulsans want in PLANITULSA, and it fits right in with PLANITULSA in several ways."

From an urban planning perspective, Warlick said, the plan earns high marks for its consistency.

"But that doesn't describe how exciting this plan is," he said.

Warlick said it's only natural there will be some concerns about the plan as it passes through the approval process. But he doesn't anticipate serious opposition to it, given the 18 months of public meetings that went into its creation.

"There's really a lot of consensus here," he said. "There might initially be some contrarians, as there always are, but this plan seems to be the product of great public engagement."

The most excitement at last week's event was generated by talk of the planned Brady Town Square, a park in the center of the district that will be bound by Brady Street to the South, Boston Avenue to the west, Cameron Street to the north and Cincinnati Avenue to the east. The park will feature a huge green space called the Brady Lawn, as well as performance spaces, food vendors, gardens, a fountain and a public marketplace.

The park will feature a geothermal well field and distribution system powered by a solar panel system located on the roof of a renovated historic freight

loading dock. The well field will provide heating and air conditioning for the adjacent Mathews Building, future home of the Adkins Collection and a satellite location of the Philbrook Museum of Art. Other businesses and residents in the neighborhood also will be able to access the system to reduce energy demand.

Stava put a price tag of \$7 million to \$8 million on the park, but he said all of the funding is in place to begin construction in July. The site currently is home to a parking lot for Central Freight Lines Inc., a trucking company, but Greg Gray, president of the Brady Business Association, said that firm will vacate the property by June 30.

"As Central Trucking moves out, we'll start on the wells," he said.

The park will be financed with grants, Vision 2025 funds and money from the George Kaiser Family Foundation, he said.

Along with the park will come another greening project, with more than 600 trees to be planted in the Brady during the next 18 months, along with the placement of 250 LED dark sky-friendly streetlights. Gray said the streetscaping will be done in three segments, with the first stage calling for work from the new ONEOK Field on the district's east border to Boston Avenue. After that will come work from Boston Avenue to Boulder Avenue, then Boulder Avenue to the BOK Center.

Stava is particularly anxious to see that work done, believing it will make the area much more attractive to those concerned about safety. The grass, trees and lighting will give the Brady much more of a community feel and a greater

sense of accessibility, he said.

"That really allows retail, entertainment and the arts to flourish," he said. "When people feel safe, they'll park their car, walk around and find a place to eat."

Gray said he and other supporters of the plan would be seeking other funds to finance the creation of more geothermal well fields up and down Brady.

"We're still looking for grant money for that," he said. "But that's a big if in this economy."

Gray, a medical doctor, became interested in the Brady several years ago when he developed the urge to start an arts-related business. He said he quickly recognized the potential of the Brady and eventually opted to open Club 209, which he described as a martini and arts lounge, on North Boulder Avenue.

He expects the Brady Town Square to be finished in 18 months—"Unless we hit oil when we drill down," he said, smiling—with the other major components of the plan to be in place within 18 to 24 months. Other highly touted additions to the district, such as the renovation of the Mathews Warehouse, and the addition of the Oklahoma Pop and Cain's Ballroom museums, are farther out on the horizon but should draw attention to the district for years to come.

Organizers of last week's event also used the gathering to unveil the Brady's new logo—which will be used on all of the district's materials, including street banners—and its Web site, thebradyartsdistrict.com, which features a link to the entire 102-page small-area plan.

Making the specifics of the Brady Arts District small-area plan a reality will take a lot of doing—and even more money—but organizers of last week's event didn't seem put off by the challenge. Tom Borrup of the Minneapolis-based firm Creative Community Builders, which has helped lead the planning and coordination effort, set the bar particularly high during his remarks.

"We have the opportunity to be the best arts district in the country in the next few years," he said. **UTW**

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Sketch-Pad Dreaming. New plans for the Brady Arts District includes Brady Town Square and a geothermal well field to heat and air condition areas including Mathew Building.