

# Counties' 2 cities take fresh looks at downtowns

## Greenwood: Reshaping Old City Park seen as stimulus for new commercial development

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Residents pack Greenwood's Old City Park for bantam league football on fall weeknights and during the summer street fair at the annual Freedom Fest.

But in 10 years, people could visit the park to wade in a 50-foot-wide creek, play in a splash area, shop at boutique stores or enjoy drinks on a patio overlooking a widened creek surrounded by native landscaping.

An engineering firm hired by the

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city envisions a transformed Old City Park that's bordered by new three-story buildings along Main Street and Madison Avenue, where people would shop, dine and live.

A new tree-lined boulevard would lead south from Main Street to a splash park designed as a piece of public art and, farther south, a re-imagined park that

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SUBMITTED ILLUSTRATION  
An artist's rendering shows the possible new look for downtown Greenwood.

## Franklin: New county office building linked to parking garage part of mayor's vision

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Picture this in Franklin: A county office building stands across the street from the courthouse with room for the prosecutor's staff, at least one new courtroom and storage for voting machines.

Attached to the building is a parking garage that by day is an area for county employees to park and after hours is open to the public.

That is one of at least four options commissioners are consid-

ering as a new location for county offices that were displaced when the June flood destroyed the Oren Wright Building.

Franklin's mayor has offered to use city money to build an estimated \$2.5 million parking garage on a county-owned lot adjacent to Madison Street and have the garage attached to a new Oren Wright Building, which would house more than 40 county employees displaced by floodwaters in June.

But in exchange for building the parking garage, Fred Paris wants

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**Watch for it in the Daily Journal:** Keep up with the progress of downtown Franklin redevelopment, including the possibility of elevating parts of the city.

## Greenwood

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would feature a widened creek, a looping walkway and an overlook.

Making the proposed improvements to the park likely would cost about \$3 million, said Cory Whitesell, project engineer. That would be only the initial investment of tax dollars because roadwork also would be required.

Engineering firm Hannum, Wagle & Cline determined during a study that Pleasant Creek could be widened so children could play in it but that it would not be possible to turn it into a pond where people could fish or ride in paddle boats, a vision that Mayor Charles Henderson initially proposed during his 2008 State of the City address.

Silt from erosion would create maintenance nightmares, Whitesell said. The cost would run too high, and the pond would cut into space for public festivals and create a widened floodplain that would prohibit new development. The result would be a body of water smaller than rainwater collection ponds in most subdivisions, which would hardly be the attraction hoped for, he said.

Instead, the engineering firm proposed a wider creek that would be naturalized with stones and native plants.

An expanded playground area would include new play equipment, a shelter and a public restroom. A new entrance to the park from Main Street would feature a splash park, where jets of water would arch from the concrete. Though intended for children, it would be designed as a piece of



SUBMITTED ILLUSTRATION  
A design for a renovated downtown Greenwood is seen in an artist's rendering. The project could include a splash park and a tree-lined entrance.

public art so it could have year-round use, Whitesell said.

Six new buildings would abut the park, which would serve as a town square-type gathering place. Four new three-story buildings would line the south side of Main Street between Madison Avenue and Meridian Street, replacing the existing row of mostly commercial buildings between the Van Valer law firm and the First Baptist Church of Greenwood.

Two more new buildings, along Madison Avenue, would give the Old Town the desired density of an urban area, planners said. Ideally, they would be restaurants with rear patios and possibly rooftop seating overlooking the creek, Whitesell said.

As designed, the widened creek would allow the city to host major festivals at the park, including Freedom Fest and a planned fall arts festival, Old Town revitalization committee chairwoman Gail Richards said. An overlook along Madison Avenue could serve as a performing stage that would allow the city to

stage concerts at the park.

"This is exciting," she said. "It's something to look forward to. Now more than ever, we need something to look forward to."

Plans include preserving the historic Machledt House, site of the Southside Art League Gallery, which potentially could be the site of outdoor arts events, Whitesell said.

Five historic buildings along the south side of Main Street would be razed in order to widen Main Street to three lanes with wider sidewalks lined with native trees.

Such aesthetic improvements should spur new investment around the park, Whitesell said.

Private developers would buy the land needed, demolish the structures and erect multistory buildings that would house specialty retail, restaurants and upper-floor condominiums or apartments, he said. The process will take time.

"It's designed to happen incrementally, in phases," Whitesell said. "The project will move at the pace of private capital. With

## At a glance: Old City Park

Greenwood's Old Town revitalization plan would include a \$3 million investment in Old City Park, which would be intended to encourage redevelopment along Main Street and Madison Avenue. An engineering firm envisions the following improvements:

- A splash park will be constructed near a new tree-lined entrance off Main Street.
- Pleasant Creek will be widened and restored as a natural channel lined with rocks, plants and grass.
- A walkway would circle the park, which would include new landscaping and an expansive lawn to use for festivals and other events.
- An overlook will be built near the Greenwood Public Library parking lot.
- A picnic shelter and a public restroom will be added.
- The sledding hill and the stone shelter would remain.

the economy now, it's not going to happen overnight."

New commercial development likely would take five to 10 years, he said.

When new development does come in, Old Town would have round-the-clock vibrancy, Whitesell said. Families and older residents in the city's core neighborhoods would want to frequent a unique park. New residents would be interested in living within a two-minute walk of restaurants, nightlife and stores "with a local or specialty flavor," Whitesell said.

Having so many attractions in the center of town would help attract new businesses, said Christian Maslowski, executive director of the Greater Greenwood Chamber of Commerce. A revitalized Old Town would give both visitors and potential investors a positive image of the city, he said.

The project would constitute the progress in the city's slogan of "pride and progress," Maslowski said.

The Greenwood City Council will have to show leadership on the plans, Henderson said. Developers have told him they would be willing to invest in redevelopment only if the city puts money into improving the area.

"If we don't make a commitment, it's going to stay like it is forever and a day," he said. "This will require the political will to get it done."

The \$3 million price tag for park improvements does not include roadwork that would have to be done along Machledt Drive and Main Street or the new entry road from Main Street.

Developers would have to be willing to pledge commitment to doing projects before the city could commit that much money, city council member Ron Deer said.

No one has done any research into how the city would pay for it, but one option would be to set up a tax-increment financing district in the Old Town, he said.

Late council member John Gibson first proposed that idea, which could be viable but would take some time to generate enough tax revenue from new development to start funding projects, Deer said.

The city council should recognize that a revitalized Old Town would be a major asset to the city, council member Brent Corey said. If the plans move forward, the city will have to look at renaming the park, he said.

"If this happens, it's obvious that Old City Park won't do," Corey said. "Having just looked at the plans, I would suggest something more like center city park."