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Memphis Heritage Trail

GREG AKERS



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Why It Matters:

"It's critical that we focus on this area [Memphis Heritage Trail] at this time, because we are in the midst of renovating and rebuilding in this zone and if we are not careful in our progress we will overlook and build over and tear down some of the essential components of this great history." — *A C Wharton, mayor, City of Memphis*

Stakeholders:

Africa in April Cultural Awareness Festival, Blues Foundation, Downtown Memphis Commission, Hattiloo Theatre, Heritage Tours, Memphis Landmarks Commission, Memphis Black Arts Alliance, Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau, Memphis Housing Authority, National Civil Rights Museum, Shelby County Historical Commission, Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Sun Studio, UrbanArt Commission, Withers Collection Museum and Gallery

Leaders and Consultants:

A C Wharton, City of Memphis; Robert Lipscomb, City of Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development; Luretha Phillips, Memphis Housing Authority; Dr. David

Acey, University of Memphis; Paul Morris, Downtown Memphis Commission; Ekundayo Bandele, Hattiloo Theatre; Berlin Boyd; Bill Day; Jimmy Ogle, Jimmy Ogle Tours; Elaine Turner, Heritage Tours; Bennie West, Memphis Black Arts Alliance; June West, Memphis Heritage; Dr. Miriam Decosta-Willis; J.W. Gibson, Terry Lynch, Gary Prosterman, and Karl and Gail Schledwitz, Main Street Apartment Partners.

Area Boundaries:

Beale St., Main St., E.H. Crump Blvd., and Walnut St.

Area History:

The history of downtown Memphis is a colorful and rocky one, involving the birth of a new type of music, a large role in the cotton industry, direct involvement in the Civil War and the civil rights movement as well as many economic ups and downs. In its heyday, downtown Memphis was a vibrant center of shipping and commerce. As the largest port on the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans, Memphis developed as a transportation center and a market for large quantities of cotton grown in the area. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Memphis was a booming and prosperous city that had capitalized on its river access, but by the late twentieth century, the historic center city had fallen on hard times.

Current Conditions:

Downtown is a bustling residential, business, and entertainment center and a dynamic development market, with approximately \$3 billion in development projects recently completed, under way, or scheduled to begin. But areas of blight still need attention and connectivity.

Ideal Situation:

The Memphis Heritage Trail public-private collaborative will serve as a complementary redevelopment effort to the tremendous development activity that has already taken place in downtown Memphis. The goal is to redevelop a 20-block peripheral section of downtown by leveraging public investments in infrastructure, green space, and Hope VI initiatives in order to encourage private investment in this fertile development district. The public's return on investment will be a transformation of public housing as we know it into self-sufficient and sustainable communities. Among the area's assets are the National Civil Rights Museum, FedExForum, the Chisca Hotel, Clayborn Temple, Hunt-Phelan property, Robert Church Park, and the Universal Life Insurance Co. building. By eradicating blight in between already developed areas, downtown will gain connectivity and become more dynamic.

How To Get To the Ideal:

A team is developing an Implementation Plan to create the Memphis Heritage Trail as well as to determine the cost and schedule for the catalytic projects and future construction.

Current Funding Situation:

The City of Memphis won \$22 million in federal funding for the demolition and revitalization of Cleaborn Homes as well as a \$250,000 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant for Foote Homes. The Memphis Heritage Trail can bolster these projects and provide new opportunities for expanding the cultural economy and workforce. Memphis City Council approved \$2 million for blight remediation at the Chisca Hotel and a \$1 million loan through a PILOT extension fund for the Downtown Parking Authority to buy and renovate the Chisca's parking garage.

Funding Goal:

Secure an additional \$30 million in federal funding through the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant and attract additional new investments such as the Arts Place and Our Town Grants, as well as the support of local and state governments and the philanthropic and corporate sectors. The Chisca redevelopment is expected to cost \$19.5

million, with \$17 million of that coming from private financing.

Jobs Created:

Pennrose Properties, Community Capital, Duvernay + Brooks, Self + Tucker Architects, Looney Ricks Kiss, Barge Waggoner Sumner & Cannon, SSR Ellers, Jackson & Person Associates, and Capstone Building Corp. As plans develop, more firms would be utilized for planning, design, architecture, engineering, and construction work.

How You Can Help:

Participate in the planning and express your support for creating the Memphis Heritage Trail. The project needs early involvement to shape an agenda focused on affordable housing, blight elimination, green space, neighborhood retail, and job opportunities all leveraged by community culture and heritage. An international cultural destination requires additional touch points, participation, and perspectives to expand a diverse tourist and residential base.

Contact:

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