

Revised Arch plan has grand sweep of an entrance

By Charlene Prost, special to the Beacon

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RENDERINGS PROVIDED BY CITYARCHRIVER

View of the Arch from the Old Courthouse. At left, the current grounds, with Luther Ely Smith Park separated from the Arch grounds by the depressed lanes of I-70. At right, a rendering of the plans including a cap over I-70 and the new entrance to the Museum of Westward Expansion.

Start of update: More park land and cultural activities for the riverfront. Easier, more attractive ways to get to the Gateway Arch and its museum. Even a fix for the confusing, five-legged intersection at Washington Avenue and Memorial Drive.

Those were among the topics on the agenda Wednesday when the latest version of the plan to revive the Gateway Arch grounds, connecting it better to its improved surroundings, was unveiled at a public meeting at the America's Center downtown.

Among those speaking were Walter Metcalfe Jr., a leader of the CityArchRiver 2015 Foundation, and Tom Bradley, superintendent of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. **End of update.**

Probably the most prominent and dramatic feature of the revised plan is a continuous stretch, or sweep, of landscaped green space providing a pleasant walk from Fourth Street just east of the Old Courthouse and the Gateway Mall directly onto the Arch grounds.

Within that stretch is a glassy new entrance to the Arch with a to-be-expanded museum beneath it. That new entrance replaces the existing one, which will be used only as an exit.

But don't call this landscaped green sweep a "lid" over the sunken lanes of Interstate 70. Gullivar Shepard, a senior associate at Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Brooklyn, prefers to call the block-wide expanse a "park over the highway."

Another update: The estimated cost has shrunk some. The latest total, including highway and public improvements, design and engineering, contingencies and everything else, is now \$553 million, down from \$578 million.

The reason? "Value analysis and further thinking," said Metcalfe.

Shepard and James Smith, another senior associate at the Van Valkenburgh landscape architecture firm, described the updated plan in an interview before the public meeting.

Some highlights:

- That green sweep was designed as an attraction and as a way to get visitors into and out of the Arch, and the museum beneath it, in a faster, more pleasant way.
- The new entrance, for example, is built into a rise, or berm, with a courtyard in front. "The courtyard is a place to meet," Shepard says, "and there's lots of shade for summer."
- Once inside, visitors can walk underground through museum exhibits all the way to the Arch. Or if they prefer, they can stay above ground and find new views and things to see along the way. "We've added interesting places to be where you can see, and lose, views of the Arch," Shepard said, "and we've added lots of trees."
- What's now Luther Ely Smith Park will be part of the sweep. Changes along Market and Chestnut streets will provide room for tour buses and to park there rather than on the riverfront, as they do now. The idea, the designers said, is to get visitors closer to the green sweep that will lead them easily

and pleasantly into the museum entrance. "They will no longer have to walk up the stairs and come in kind of the back door," Shepard said.

Combined with remote ticketing stations for Arch visits, these changes should mean more foot traffic and activity downtown. Up to 2.5 million people visit the Arch each year, Shepard said, and many approach from buses that park or drop them on the river side of the Arch grounds. "We'll be bringing those people and that activity into the city," he said.

New views, new activities

In addition to fixing that confusing intersection at Washington Avenue, the revised plan would make other changes to add more park land. Exit and entrance lanes and ramps for Interstate 70 that cross Washington will be switched. Six blocks of Memorial Drive alongside the Arch grounds, no longer needed as an entry for the interstate, would become parkland. Parts of Washington alongside the Eads Bridge would be closed to provide more open space.

The envisioned North End would extend from the Eads Bridge south to and including the site of the parking garage on the Arch grounds after it is demolished. The designers, along with city planners, are working to replace the garage parking with other nearby, reasonably priced parking -- a prerequisite before the garage is taken down.

Shepard said that removing the garage will dramatically expand views of the historic arched Eads Bridge and help connect the bridge and Laclede's Landing north of it with the Arch grounds.

That also will provide space for something other than cars and parking. On the drawing board: a "learn and play" area for children about the westward expansion, operated by the National Park Service; a "festival lawn space"; and tents to house exhibits and programs from other area museums and cultural institutions.

Edward Uhlir, executive director of Millennium Park Inc. in Chicago, suggested involving museums and cultural institutions such as the St. Louis Zoo or Missouri Botanical Garden.

Metcalf said this week that planners here have been exploring that idea and finding some interest. He said discussions so far have involved the St. Louis Zoo, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis Science Center, the Magic House, Cahokia Mounds, Laumeier Sculpture Park, among others.

Another project moving forward is the redesign of Kiener Plaza in the Gateway Mall, a project undertaken by the public-private Gateway Mall Conservancy, and that will include new features, such as a performance facility, beer garden and restaurant.

Peter Fischer, the conservancy president, says the design work is finished. He said, The "early cost" estimate" for Kiener is under \$20 million and "we are all awaiting the next step."

Fischer also leads the private Gateway Foundation that built the popular Citygarden, but that foundation is not involved with the Kiener project.

As for Kiener, Metcalfe said that project "is going to happen" after money is in hand to build it.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS ON AGENDA

Metcalfe, who leads the public-private foundation overseeing the Arch grounds project, updated other aspects as well during the interview.

The Great Rivers Greenway Group, for example, is working on improving Leonor K. Sullivan Boulevard. Metcalfe said the group wants to expand its bike trail along and raise Sullivan so it can stay open longer when floods come.

Start of update: Susan Trautman, executive director of Great Rivers Greenway, said at the meeting that her group has already budgeted about \$15 million to get those improvements underway. The total costs would be \$25-\$30 million. **End of update.**

The Metro East Park and Recreation District, which operates the Malcolm W. Martin Memorial Park on Illinois side of the river, is working on plans to extend a bike trail from the McKinley Bridge into the park, improve Front Street leading to the park and make other improvements to make the park more accessible. Metcalfe said efforts also are underway to get an extension of Route 3 built into the area.

Work is progressing also to make that gondola-like aerial tramway linking both banks of the river alongside the Poplar Street Bridge a reality. And, he said, the National Park Service is working on how to someday make about 100 acres on the Illinois side of the river part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, more informally called the Arch grounds.

Bradley said in a recent interview that plans are progressing as well for Arch grounds improvements that will include finding sustainable ways to redo the ponds and landscaping without doing harm to Dan Kiley's original design.

So far, the CityArch River 2015 Foundation has helped raise around \$70 million. That includes \$57 million in federal, state and private money to help pay for the park over the highway. In addition to \$10 million the foundation contributed for the park, it raised more than \$2 million to pay for the design competition and more than \$10 million to cover design and engineering work in progress -- all of it private money.

As for getting everything built by the 2015 deadline, the Arch's 50th anniversary, Metcalfe had this to say: "I'm not saying every single component will be shiny and done" by 2015, "but we will have access completely solved by then, and we will be well along the way on many other aspects."

And a construction schedule? Not yet, he says.