



Urban Times

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downtown dream is coming true

Illustrations courtesy of Rundell Ernstberger Associates LLC



Looking north along Alabama Street toward Riley Towers: The first leg to be completed next year

From NOVEMBER 2006:



I'm not sure he's wrong about automobiles," he said. "With all their speed forward they may be a step backward in civilization – that is, in spiritual civilization. It may be that they will not add to the beauty of the world, nor to the life of men's souls. I am not sure. But automobiles have come, and they bring a greater change in our life than most of us expect. ... and it may be that George is right, and that the spiritual alteration will be bad for us. Perhaps, ten or twenty years from now, if we can see the inward change in men by that time, I shouldn't be able to defend the gasoline engine, but would have to agree with him that automobiles 'had no business to be invented.'"

**From "The Magnificent Ambersons,"
by Indianapolis's own Booth Tarkington, 1918**

A downtown dream is coming true

The Cultural Trail has the potential to set Indy apart from the rest

BY BILL BROOKS

SCORE ONE FOR THE PEDESTRIANS AND THE BICYCLISTS. Score one for folks who live Downtown and already know about archaic ideas such as sidewalks.

Score one for George Amberson – the ill-fated focus of Booth Tarkington's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "The Magnificent Ambersons" – a man doomed by his failure to see how the automobile would change the city's demographics and lifestyles.

And score one for Indianapolis, which is embarking upon the biggest idea since Carl Fisher turned a Westside pasture into an automobile racetrack – perhaps the biggest idea to hit since Alexander Ralston turned wilderness into the future capital of the young State of Indiana.

This isn't thinking outside the box; it's using the box as a stepstool so the city can climb into the 21st Century.

It is – in the words of Brian Payne, president of the Central Indiana Community Foundation – taking 7½ miles of downtown traffic lanes away from cars and giving them to people on foot, people on bicycles, to people with baby strollers.

"It" is the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, an idea that belonged first to Payne, president of the Central Indiana Community Foundation. Why not build a Monon Trail-type pathway to circle the heart of Downtown, linking not only the city's top cultural amenities but also the cultural districts such as Mass Ave and the Wholesale District? Why not build a pathway that will serve as a hub for the rapidly expanding greenways system that is now reaching into the suburban counties?

It is now an idea that belongs to the entire city, having been fully embraced by Mayor Bart Peterson and his staff, chief among them then-Deputy Mayor Jane Henegar and Keira Amstutz, now the mayor's chief counsel and director of policy.



Illustrations provided by Runsdell Ernstberger Associates, LLC

▲ The trail along Alabama Street at the New York Street intersection (left). The design is considered “typical,” because the final design will depend upon feedback from stakeholders affected by the trail – and may even vary from section to section to harmonize with the different cultural districts. A series of public meetings will be conducted to help make the final determinations.

Peterson was quick to understand Payne’s belief that the Cultural Trail would not only be a first-class amenity for those of us who live here – but much more so a symbol for Indianapolis in the same way the Gateway Arch serves St. Louis or the Space Needle serves Seattle.

“The Cultural Trail will be an icon for the City of Indianapolis,” Peterson said when the trail was formally unveiled on Oct. 13. “It will be a celebration of our city and its Downtown, a celebration of our remarkable greenway trails, a celebration of arts and culture in city of Indianapolis.”

But Peterson said the Cultural Trail is about much more than culture or recreation. He sees it as a major economic development tool.

“If anyone needs any down-on-the-ground, practical reason we should do anything like this, I want to say that when I first came into office many top corporate CEOs talked to me and said the most important thing you can do for economic development is to make the city interesting, exciting, beautiful – because its about getting talent.



▲ Preliminary sketches show how the Cultural Trail would find its way up the 800 block of Mass Ave (above, looking toward the East End).

“That’s our greatest challenge,” the business leaders told the mayor, “not tax abatement or infrastructure improvements. Do everything you can.”

By this time, most folks have come to understand

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the concept. The first news report about the Cultural Trail appeared in The Lockerbie Letter (the forerunner of Urban Times) in March 2003. That report focused on information provided by Henegar, who pointed out that the main obstacle was – as is almost always the case – money.

Payne, the idea man, was well-positioned to do something about that. Over the ensuing three years, he has lined up “community partners” including the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce; the Arts Council of Indianapolis; BioCrossroads; Greenways Foundation; Indiana Sports Corp.; Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association; Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission; Indianapolis Downtown, Inc.; The Indy Partnership; IUPUI; Keep Indianapolis Beautiful; and White River State Park.

Along the way, Payne and city officials were able to secure 15 million in federal transportation dollars – but it wasn’t until Payne approached local philanthropists Gene and Marilyn Glick that it became time to dance.

The Glicks came forward with \$15 million – three times what Payne had asked for – as long as the Cultural Trail would become a symbol of peace and humanitarianism. Payne called it, instead of the usual vertical monument, a 370,000-foot-long horizontal monument.

For their major contribution (and because they wanted the city’s name to remain at the forefront), the Indianapolis Cultural Trail will be subtitled “A Legacy of Gene and Marilyn Glick.”

The contribution put Payne & Co. at \$34 million – but the work is not done, since the project has a price tag of just over \$50 million.

Work on the Cultural Trail will begin next year along Alabama Street, the eastern leg of the main loop. The 2008 schedule includes the spur that will shoot northeast from Alabama and North streets to the Monon Trail, winding through Chatham Arch on New Jersey, Walnut and College streets before going up the 800 block of Mass Ave.

When finished, the 7½ mile loop will be liberally sprinkled with public art and tributes to humanitarians. It will, Payne believes, “completely change the way our nation and the world perceives Indianapolis.”

Payne thinks it is not enough for Indianapolis to build its reputation by pleasantly surprising visitors.

“We think that’s terrific,” he said, “but we don’t think that’s good enough for the 21st Century. To be a competitive, world-class thriving city in a very competitive global marketplace,” he said, “what we need to do is make people think about Indianapolis differently *before* they ever get here, and cause them to get here.”

George Amberson might even like it. ■

THE TIMELINE

2007

East Corridor - Alabama Street.

2008

North Corridor - St. Clair St., part of The Canal (between St. Clair and Walnut streets), Walnut Street, Meridian Street, American Legion Mall and North Street.

Northeast Corridor - North Street, New Jersey Street, Walnut Street, College Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue to 10th Street connecting to the Monon Trail.

2009

West Corridor - The Canal, Indiana Avenue, Blackford Street, Washington Street and West Street.

Central Corridor - Market Street, Monument Circle, Illinois Street, Washington Street, Senate Avenue and Government Place.

Southeast Corridor - Pennsylvania Street and Virginia Avenue.

OTHER FACTS

□ The Indianapolis Cultural Trail will pass through five of the city’s six cultural districts – Mass Ave, Indiana Avenue, White River State Park/Canal, the Wholesale District, and Fountain Square. The sixth, Broad Ripple, will be linked by the Monon Trail.

□ City officials believe that only about 120 parking spaces will be lost to the Cultural Trail, since most of the space will be surrendered by traffic lanes. Along the eastern leg, one stretch that will be lost is the 500 block of Alabama Street, alongside the Murat Center.

□ Old Northside resident Kevin Osborn, a principal with Rundell Ernstberger Associates, is project designer for the Cultural Trail.

□ The 12 tributes to peace and humanitarians to be located at key intersections along the Cultural Trail will not be financed out of project funds, because Gene and Marilyn Glick have committed to covering those costs (about \$1.5 million) out of a separate fund. ■