

# Real estate and urban planning news: Woodall Rodgers Park began construction mid-January

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Woodall Rodgers, now serving as a dividing line between Downtown and Uptown, will soon be home to a new five-acre park. Yes, you heard correctly--a park on top of the freeway. The construction of Dallas' park follows a recent trend in America, a trend that involves parks and a relentless desire to build them, no matter what it takes. At a rate not seen since the City Beautiful Movement, cities are building parks. They are building parks on top of freeways, tearing down freeways and replacing them with parks, moving freeways underground to make way for parks, and even building parks on top of railways.

In college, we joked about painting all the concrete green, with little flowers and trees. Well, this is the real thing. Dallas is actually bringing in the dump trucks and grass and flowers and creating land where there once was none. And in the dreaded reality of our current economic situation, construction actually began on the idealic park this January! Truth be told, Dallas cannot afford not to build the park. As it turns out, trading in your highways for parks can be quite financially lucrative. The park will actually help to pay for itself, as costs will be partially offset by increases in tax revenues due to new jobs, the selling of naming rights, and new development and increases in land values surrounding the park. After, all, which would you pay more for: The freeway view or the park view? I'll have the park view, please!

During the 60's, former Mayor Erik Jonsson fought to depress Woodall Rodgers through the use of a trench, allowing construction of a deck over the freeway at a later time. He is quoted as saying I knew if they built the freeway at ground level, it would fence in downtown forever. His foresight and determination will now save downtown Dallas, as this park will create a vibrant connection between Downtown, West End, the Arts District and Uptown/Victory Park, giving Downtown workers and residents new places to shop and recreate within walking distance of their homes and a needed place to stroll in the moonlight after performances at the Arts District.

The supporting structure for the park is being built by Jacobs Carter Burgess. Steel beams will run along Woodall Rodgers and support a substructure deep enough to allow the planting of trees and plants and strong enough to support the park's structures. **The park is being planned and designed by well-known landscape architect James Burnett, FASLA and Dan Biederman, who worked on the very successful Bryant Park, the original site of Louis Paxton's famous Crystal Palace Exhibition of the 1853 World's Fair. Just as his work on Bryant Park restored a very quickly declining area of New York, it's hoped that this**

**park will bring new life to a somewhat stagnant Downtown and Uptown and feed a growing Arts District.**

The Programming Strategy: To get people to the park, there has to be a draw, and to get people to walk anywhere in the hot Texas sun, it has to be goooood. The design is driven by the program, says Biederman. The idea is to program the park so that there's always a reason to go and always something to do at any time of day. The programming will be essential to creating needed activity for the area and will be the #1 key element in the success of the park and the area as a whole. Dan Biederman says he hopes the park will be jammed between 5 and 11 pm. He wants to accommodate singles in a social place at lunch and after 5pm. Much like Bryant Park, the park will include a reading room, places to play chess, kiosks to sell food. In Dallas' park, he adds a dog park, a performance stage and a children's playground to complete the picture, creating activity around the clock 7 days/week.

This park will give Dallas a new pulse and breathe new life into the city. The new uses that the park will provide are in demand in the area, and the additional connectivity should further stimulate this demand, filling in some gaps and encouraging further development. The park's strategic location will make the entire area more walkable. Currently, area residents don't have much of a choice except to drive to meet basic needs. The new park will provide a big chunk of activity, giving a sudden jolt of life to the area, something the City has been trying to achieve for many years.

As a Dallasite, I'm anxiously awaiting the park's completion, currently scheduled for 2011. In contrast to many modern parks, which can be sterile and uninspiring, I have hopes of a design with character, colorful artwork and well-established shade trees. With the park's key location between Downtown, the Arts District, and Uptown, the park's design can either make or break the city. If the design is good, people will use it, and Dallas will be more successful as a place to live and work. As the park's architect has been quoted as saying, [G]reat cities have great parks, and I'm hoping this new park will help make Dallas great.

The park is being funded by both private and public funds. The project started as a private effort, with John Zogg, then of Crescent Real Estate Equities, Linda Owen, of the Real Estate Council (TREC), and Jody Grant of Texas Capital Bank. Mayor Johnson's daughter and son-in-law were early donors, and many other area businesses and cultural leaders have made substantial efforts. Much work and support has also come from the public sector, including the City of Dallas, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst, and a number of state senators. Dallasites are very grateful for all their efforts.