

Framing the Issue

Redeveloping the Executive Inn property

Assessing Planning and Financing Options

For more than three decades, the 600-room Executive Inn Rivermont anchored our tourism and convention industry, bringing top-name entertainment to our community and each year introducing thousands of visitors to Owensboro-Daviess County.

Following the death of hotel developer and owner, Bob Green, the hotel suffered a series of ownership changes and bankruptcies. The facility deteriorated. Convention groups cancelled meetings. Even the Executive Inn staff and tourism boosters acknowledged that the hotel was no longer a competitive property that could be expected to attract major events. Seventeen out-of-town banks had an interest in the property. In June 2008, the owners closed the doors.

Seven months before it closed, the hotel was the setting for an unprecedented civic assembly that attracted 650 participants from all walks of life and all areas of Owensboro and Daviess County. During the “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®, the transformation of downtown Owensboro emerged as a top community priority.

The redevelopment of the Executive Inn property is central to that challenge.

A fresh start

After sitting vacant for nearly nine months, on February 21, 2009 Owensboro and Daviess County government officials announced plans to purchase the Executive Inn Rivermont – the hotel, convention center, and some 17 acres of riverfront property for \$5 million. Many business and community leaders endorsed the move as a significant, prudent and strategic economic development initiative that could dramatically enhance the downtown master plan that was unveiled in November.

An active development role

Opponents have countered that government should not be involved as a redevelopment partner, but should rather limit its role to basic services: police, fire, sanitation, streets, etc. Some, in fact, have suggested that local governments “ran off” former Executive Inn owner John Bays who made significant improvements to the hotel and promised more if a casino license could be secured.

Officials stress that the intent of the purchase is not for local government to venture into the hotel business, but rather to secure premium riverfront property that will be contiguous to a future hotel and convention center so as to properly plan and control its reconstruction with private developers.

Outside the scope of the master plan

The purchase and redevelopment of the Executive Inn property was not included in the downtown master plan, nor was the cost of acquisition, demolition or public infrastructure improvements that may be needed before lots can be made available to private developers.

Many issues to resolve

City and county officials, professional planners and the Gateway Planning Group (downtown master planners) are already examining issues and options associated with the Executive Inn property. To facilitate informed, civil and meaningful public participation, we offer balanced perspectives on the following strategic questions:



Issue #1: Do we keep the existing tower?

Those who think we should may say...

- It appears to be a given that the hotel rooms west of the main tower are not salvageable due to fire damage and general deterioration. However, the main seven-story tower with its river views could be preserved.
- It would be a needless expense to tear down the tower.
- The atrium and river views are dramatic and impressive.

Those who think we should not may say...

- Hotel operators who have examined the property conclude that the atrium design includes too much nonrevenue-producing space that is cost-prohibitive to maintain, heat, and cool.
- The interior space is attractive, but the exterior design is dated and ordinary.
- The hotel obstructs river views, is surrounded by a large parking lot that disconnects it from the rest of downtown, and it absorbs much of the riverfront property that could be preserved for public use. Private development would be better if built back off the riverfront adjacent to public space.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?



Issue #2: Do we keep the International Rooms and Exhibition Center?

Those who think we should may say...

- The meeting and convention spaces of the Executive Inn could be used (and renovated if needed) and connected to one or more new hotels.
- This option would be cheaper than building new.

Those who think we should – but only temporarily – may say...

- In order to hold on to some semblance of our tourism and convention business during the transition before a new facility can be built, the existing International Rooms and Exhibition Center could be used to accommodate some events.

Those who think we should not may say...

- Former Executive Inn sales staff indicates that the convention facilities do not meet the specifications of most associations, businesses and other customers. Ceilings are too low, acoustics are poor, and the large numbers of columns are among the deficiencies.
- The existing convention facilities also obstruct river views and would make it difficult to extend the public space west along the river from McConnell Plaza toward English Park.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?



Issue #3: Do we extend Veteran's Boulevard to the west through the Executive Inn property and connect it with First Street?

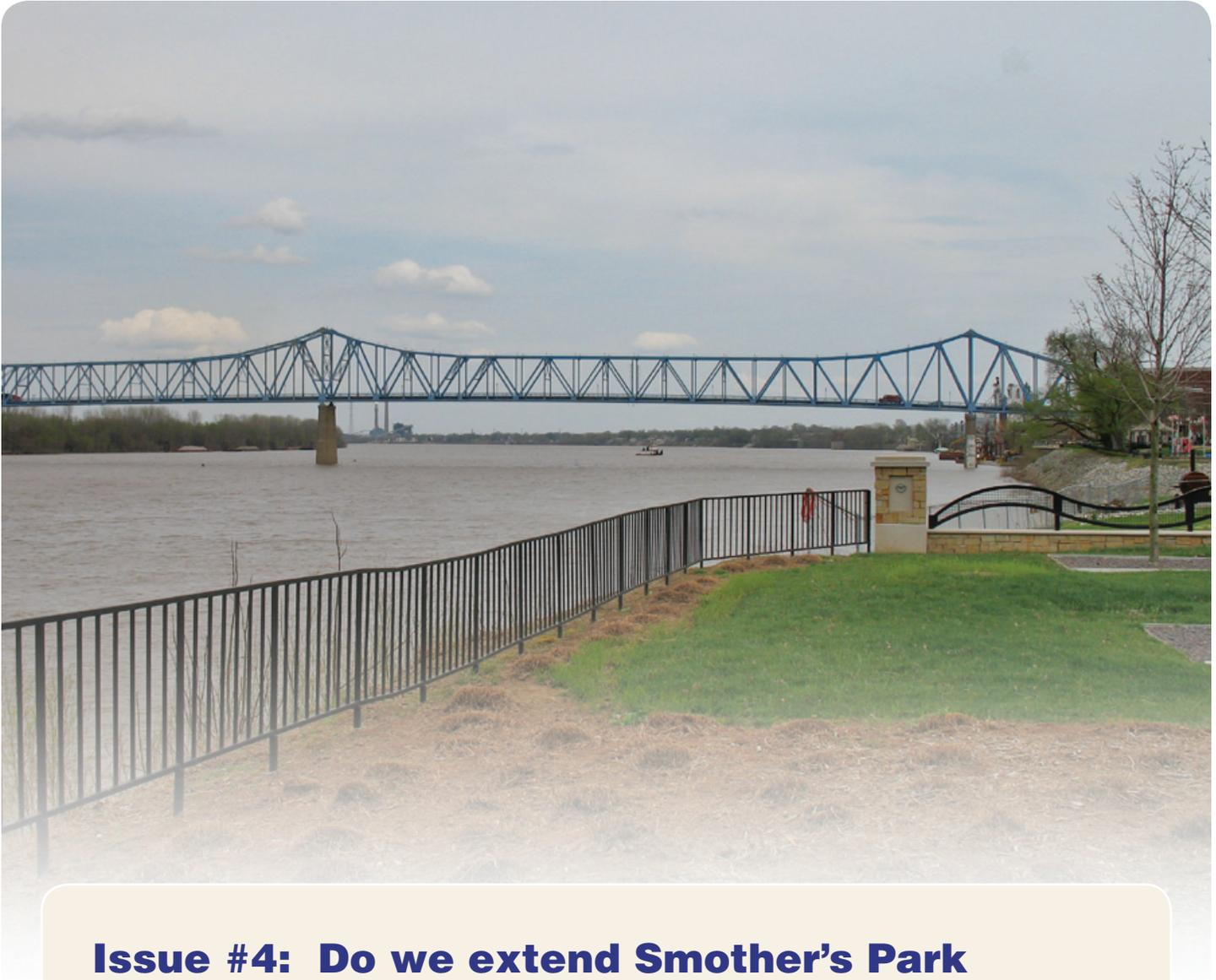
Those who think we should may say...

- This would provide a convenient connection to the west end and English Park and perhaps spur redevelopment in the neighborhood.
- Most seem to prefer a meandering street design to slow traffic rather than a direct boulevard connection.

Those who think we should not may say...

- This is another costly public infrastructure project that is not necessary.
- The area would be more appealing to homebuilders without a boulevard going through it.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?



Issue #4: Do we extend Smother's Park and McConnell Plaza to the west along the riverside of the Executive Inn property?

Those who think we should may say...

- A well-designed extension of the park and plaza will enhance the appeal of sites for private development. If Veteran's Boulevard is also extended, new construction on the south side of the street could feature river views while preserving public access to the waterfront.

Those who think we should not may say...

- Another costly project not included in the \$79 million master plan. The RiverPark Center BB&T Plaza, Smother's Park, McConnell Plaza and English Park provide plenty of access to the riverfront.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?



Issue #5: Do we preserve the Showroom Lounge?

Those who think we should may say...

- With its panoramic views, the Showroom Lounge is a distinctive landmark along the Ohio River. It can continue to be used as a restaurant, for concerts and receptions. Why tear it down?

Those who think we should not may say...

- Perhaps the most popular feature of the Riverfront Master Plan is the pedestrian connection from downtown to English Park. The Showroom Lounge obstructs that connection. The interior is attractive, but the exterior rigging and bollards are unattractive and gather driftwood.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?



Issue #6: What should eventually be built on the Executive Inn property? What is your vision for the area?

- additional hotels?
- high rise housing?
- urban village (townhouses with mixed-use commercial)?
- outdoor amphitheater?
- stadium (minor league baseball, concerts)?
- water park?
- tennis club/center?
- other _____
- other _____
- other _____

Issue #7: How should we finance the plan for the Executive Inn property?

The cost of the plan cannot be calculated until the elements and features of the plan are determined. In a general sense, do you prefer to...

- use existing city and county reserves?
- use the revenue from the insurance tax increase?
- (reduce the scope of the downtown plan if necessary)?
- use federal stimulus funds (if qualify)?
- use federal Community Development funds?
- seek state and federal stimulus funds?
- raise occupational/net profits tax?
- establish tax increment financing district?
- borrow funds as needed (assuming the debt service can be absorbed with existing revenue streams)?
- other _____
- other _____
- other _____



Issue #8: Do you consider the redevelopment of the 17 acre Executive Inn property to be a significant opportunity for Owensboro-Daviess County that deserves to be a top community priority?

Other comments, impressions and suggestions?

LEARN MORE

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