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Carpenter Park will open in May, accelerating Dallas' vision of 23 acres of new urban parks

The redesigned urban park will, its proponents say, serve as 'the gateway to near East Dallas and Deep Ellum.'



Carpenter Park under construction on Friday, March, 11, 2022 in Dallas. The park is opening in 2022. (Rebecca Slezak / Staff Photographer)

Newest green space, at 5.74 acres, is the largest in city's urban core.

Officials for Parks for Downtown Dallas announced Friday that May 3 has been designated as the official opening date for Carpenter Park, which at 5.74 acres will become the largest park in downtown Dallas and the cornerstone of an ongoing effort to revitalize the city's urban core.

The Dallas Morning News

Carpenter Park is the latest in a series of urban green spaces that local officials hope will transform downtown Dallas, whose population of residents has grown from 200 in the 1990s to more than 14,000 today.

So, to mark the occasion, the landscape architect hired to create the city's 2004 master plan for the development of Dallas' downtown greenbelt — which she updated in 2013 — flew in for a visit.

Mary Margaret Jones, whose résumé as a landscape architect includes notable redesigns in London and Moscow and U.S. cities as far flung as San Jose and Philadelphia, came to Dallas to serve as keynote speaker of the “annual meeting and luncheon” of Downtown Dallas Inc.

Jones delivered her remarks only weeks before the re-opening of the park, which was first created in 1981 as Carpenter Plaza. All other parks in the program have in common the fact that they're new and were in their previous incarnation surface parking lots.

Robert W. Decherd, the chairman, president, and CEO of DallasNews Corp. —who introduced Jones — called the new Carpenter Park “spectacular,” saying it would serve as “the gateway to near East Dallas and Deep Ellum.”

Parks for Downtown Dallas goes a step further, saying in its official literature that Carpenter will “dramatically” establish “the east-west connection from downtown.” (Decherd is chairman of the board of Parks for Downtown Dallas.)

Hefty price tag

Jones noted that 23 acres of new parks have been developed since 2004, when she was hired to develop the master plan.

It does, of course, cost money to build and renovate urban parks. In Dallas alone, she said, \$56 million had been raised by “private investment,” with an additional \$39.4 million coming from “public investment.”

Amy Meadows, the CEO of Parks for Downtown Dallas, said Friday in an interview that “a significant portion” of the \$56 million came from Parks for Downtown Dallas.

“We put in \$45.1 million,” Meadows said. “And then above that is our private funders who have contributed as well.”



President and CEO of Hargreaves Jones, Mary Margaret Jones speaks at the 2022 annual Downtown Dallas, Inc. meeting on Friday, March, 11, 2022 at the Thompson Dallas Hotel. Jones showed renderings of Carpenter Park opening in 2022. (Rebecca Slezak / Staff Photographer)

But an endowment campaign is also underway, with the goal of obtaining an additional \$50 million.

Some of that money may, of course, come from those gathered Friday in the packed ballroom of the Thompson Dallas Hotel in The National, a 51-story high-rise in downtown Dallas.

Jones supplied a graphic quoting Patrick Todd of Todd Interests — whose firm developed The National — as saying: " Urban parks are important in all aspects of quality of life ... to be able to grab a cup of coffee and bring a book, bring a friend, bring a dog, and socialize in a green setting in the midst of a dense urban jungle is unbelievable."

Coming in 2023

Todd Interests is also developing East Quarter, which Meadows says is adjacent to the newly designed Harwood Park, scheduled to open in the spring of 2023.

Jones, the president and CEO of Hargreaves Jones, an international landscape architecture and planning firm, said she was happy to come to Dallas to talk about "the power of parks."



Renderings of Carpenter Park by Hargreaves Jones (Hargreaves Jones)

Vibrant downtown parks can, she said, act as agents of change in otherwise blighted urban areas. They do so, she contends, by transcending “social, cultural, economic and ecological” conditions to culminate in a kind of shared “joyfulness.”

Unmitigated joy, she said, “is at the heart of these parks. You don’t need to over-program parks. Nature itself has value — places we can go to decompress.”

Carpenter Park, for example was once described by The Dallas Morning News as a "deserted swath of downtown Dallas' eastern edge- today a mess of trash, weeds and broken asphalt.”

But by the time it opens in May, it will offer instead “the first permanent public outdoor basketball court” in downtown Dallas; a “children’s nature play” area; a "contemplative space that features the largest concentration of gardens in downtown Dallas”; a Fountain Plaza, Food Truck Plaza, and even public art. The park will showcase in particular Portal Park Piece (Slice), a site-specific installation by artist Robert Irwin.

Because of the connective tissue it offers between various Dallas neighborhoods, Carpenter Park offers, Meadows says, “A lot of development potential. There are a lot of surface lots. So, that can be an area where development comes in after the fact— spurred by a new park.”

Asked about the lingering effect the pandemic might have on the development of downtown parks, Meadows said, “I don’t have any concerns. I have been working downtown through the pandemic, and yes, it was very quiet there — in 2020. But in 2022, things are coming back to life, fully and quickly. There is a lot of excitement, and the parks, for instance, bring a lot of people downtown.”

Jones, who oversees her firm's offices in New York, San Francisco, and Cambridge, Mass., brings to Dallas her expertise on such urban projects as Queen Elizabeth Park in London; Scissortail Park in Oklahoma City, Discovery Green in Houston; Crissy Field in San Francisco; the Denver Union Station Redevelopment; and Stanford University's Science and Engineering Quad in Palo Alto, Calif.

Once Harwood Park is open, the 23 acres of parkland developed in Dallas since the 2004 master plan will include Main Street Garden, Civic Garden, Klyde Warren Park, Pacific Plaza, West End Square, Carpenter Park and Harwood.



[Michael Granberry](#), Arts Writer. Michael Granberry was born and grew up in Dallas. He graduated from Samuell High School in Pleasant Grove in 1970 and from Southern Methodist University in 1974. Between his junior and senior years, he interned at The Washington Post during "the Watergate summer" of 1973. He spent 19 years at the Los Angeles Times before returning to Dallas.

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The redesign of John Carpenter Plaza would feature basketball and bocce courts, food trucks and other pedestrian attractions. As part of the redesign, sculptor Robert Irwin would reorient his sculpture 'Portal Park Piece (Slice)' and add some elements. (Tom Fox - Staff Photographer)