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Brownsville concert stage plan gets good reviews



An architecture firm's design for the Snowden Square redevelopment project in Brownsville.



By **Joe Napsha**

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The design for a 40-foot-by-30-foot concert stage to be built in a downtown Brownsville park was presented Tuesday to positive reviews by borough residents and officials who view the project as helping to spark interest in revitalizing the Mon Valley town.

"We're looking at it as a project that will help redevelopment" in the downtown, said James Lawver, a Brownsville borough councilman. "I'm real excited about this for our city."

The performing arts stage in the park along Market and Charles streets, where an old service station and store once stood, will feature material from Brownsville's industrial heritage. Trusses salvaged from an abandoned railroad freight building near Union Station in Brownsville as well as other material recycled from old buildings will be used, said Jen Gallagher, principal of Studio for Spatial Practice, a Pittsburgh-based architecture firm that designed the project.

The lattice work planned above the stage structurally resembles the ironwork of the historic Iron Bridge over Dunlap's Creek, which is visible from the park, Gallagher said.

An 18-inch stone wall, where visitors can sit, will be built behind the stage and act as a buffer from the creek. Gallagher said she envisions landscaping sloping down to the creek and planting vegetation to minimize access to the creek at that section of the park.

John Burnett of Brownsville, one of about a dozen people attending a meeting Tuesday in the town where

the project was discussed, said he was pleased that trusses from a former railroad freight building in Brownsville would be used in building the stage.

"It is real exciting," Burnett said.

The Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County, which is managing the project, anticipates advertising for bids for the performing arts stage in September and awarding the contract in time for some work to begin this year, said Andrew French, the authority's executive director. French said he expects the concert stage, landscaping and sidewalks would be completed by the second quarter of next year.

The authority has \$300,000 available for the project, including a \$175,000 grant from the state Department of Community and Economic Development, French said. Foundations have provided vital funding, and a team of students from Brownsville Area High School helped to raise money and awareness, as well.

The students got the project started three years ago with a vision for improving downtown Brownsville with a concert stage in the park.

"They're definitely the spirit behind this," Gallagher said.

In the second phase of the downtown revitalization, improvements to Central Park are planned and the restoration of Dunlap's Creek is on the schedule in a third phase. Long-term enhancements to Snowden Square are envisioned for a fourth phase, Gallagher said.

In addition to building a performing arts stage at Snowden Square, Lawver pointed out that TREK Development Group of Pittsburgh intends to build a \$7 million, 24-apartment senior citizen housing complex on three parcels in downtown Brownsville, and the Brownsville Free Public Library is planning a major expansion project.

Joe Napsha is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 724-836-5252 or jnapsha@tribweb.com.

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