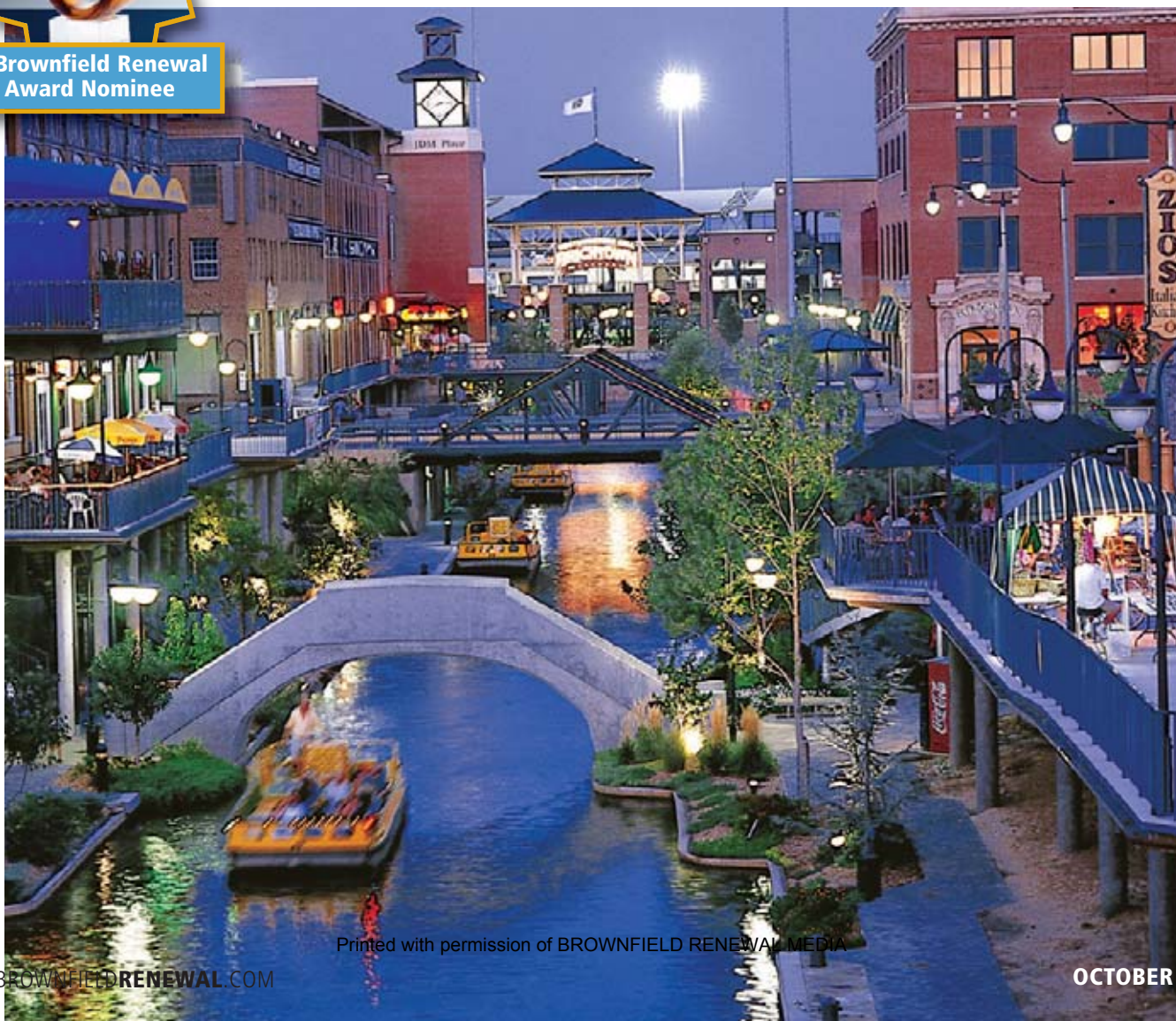




A Brownfield Renewal  
Award Nominee

*In OK City, what were once abandoned, environmentally contaminated stockyards, oilfields, refineries, warehouses, and other industrial sites were transformed into vibrant, healthy business and community centers.*



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# TRANSFORMATION OF A CITY ONE PENNY AT A TIME

In the early 1990s, then Mayor Ron Norick proposed a revolutionary idea now known as Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) which promised to bring Oklahoma City back from the depths of recession and launch the city into a vibrant new era.

The idea was simple in nature and grand in vision. By addressing the lack of infrastructure that was viewed as an impediment to growth, MAPS would set the stage for private investment and growth. The MAPS proposal consisted of a one-cent sales tax levied for a five-year period of time with the funds used to build public venues that Oklahoma City needed to attract new, diversified business growth. The gamble was whether private investment would follow if the city built the public structures. The gamble paid off and MAPS proved to be a tremendous success, bringing approximately \$3.1 billion in capital investments to Oklahoma City since the initial vote approving MAPS.

MAPS appealed to the voters because they had a voice in the process by way of approving the tax through a public election. Instead of using separate bond issue propositions for each of the proposed projects, as was often done to finance infrastructure, all of the selected projects were placed on a single ballot as a one-cent increase in the city's sales tax. This was a unique approach at trying to garner public support for the different projects and also achieve the overall vision for growth of the economy and community.

Oklahoma City was determined to revive the historic downtown area of the city to make it a vibrant entertainment area. Complicating the project were the environmental issues, as this area of Oklahoma City housed one of the richest oil fields of the early 20th Century. Oil wells, refineries, railroads, and related industries were located here. Additionally, the North Canadian River flowed through the area and, historically, dumps and landfills lined the river. The whole area was a brownfield.

## A hot commodity is born

What were once abandoned, derelict, environmentally contaminated stockyards, oilfields, refineries, warehouses, and other industrial sites were transformed into vibrant, healthy business and community centers. As MAPS progressed, and new entertainment venues emerged on the skyline, a new pride appeared on the faces of residents. Private investment followed and sometimes leapt ahead of public projects. Soon restaurants, clubs, and offices sprang up in Bricktown—the new

entertainment hub of the city. Residential lofts and condos quickly followed. Much of the private development in downtown Oklahoma City would not have been possible without the large scale infrastructure improvements brought about through MAPS. Oklahoma City is now becoming a choice destination and out-of-state investors are clamoring to become part of the renaissance.

The unexpected benefits from MAPS are many and continue to mature in this transformation. For example, OKC built an National Basketball Association-caliber arena and because it was available after Hurricane Katrina, Oklahoma City was able to host the New Orleans Hornets for two seasons. This led private parties to pursue an NBA franchise to call our own and thus the Seattle Sonics was purchased and later renamed the Oklahoma City Thunder. One of the MAPS projects consisted of putting low water dams on the mostly dry North Canadian River to hold water for the canal system that wound its way through OKC.

The river-lakes provided perfect water for rowing competitions, and this year U.S. Olympic Rowing officials announced that they would locate an Olympic Training facility in Oklahoma City. Three universities have also seen this as an opportunity to attract new students and Oklahoma City University has recently announced a new high performance residential training site. Other universities with proposed and under design facilities include University of Oklahoma and University of Central Oklahoma.

If it were not for the citizens of Oklahoma City and their willingness to create their own future, MAPS may have ended up as just another “great idea” languishing from a lack of funds and public support. Oklahoma City's residents endorsed the idea that if the city provided state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure, private investment would soon follow, transforming blighted areas into lively, healthy communities and would lead to a strong economy.

“MAPS has changed not only the way we see ourselves and the way we feel about our city, it has changed the way people across the country and across the world think of and view Oklahoma City,” stated Kirk Humphreys, former Mayor of Oklahoma City. **REN**

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For an expanded version of this article, including the newly-unveiled “Core to Shore” plan in OKC, please visit [www.brownfieldrenewal.com/OKC](http://www.brownfieldrenewal.com/OKC)