



A new rendering of the proposed South Loop Link park that would cover a four-block stretch of I-670 from Wyandotte to Grand was presented at a briefing this week. This is the eastern superblock option that would close Walnut Street. (Rendering | OJB Landscape Architecture)

- *South Loop Park Backers Pursue Opening for World Cup*

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Nearly Half Of The \$200M Project Has Been Raised

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Published September 21st, 2023 at 10:23 AM

Backers of the proposed South Loop Link are pursuing an aggressive schedule to have the downtown park ready for the World Cup games in 2026 and have arranged \$90 million to date for the \$200 million-plus endeavor.

At a briefing this week on the latest designs for the four-block park that would cap Interstate 670 and reconnect downtown with the Crossroads, Bill Dietrich, president and CEO of the Downtown Council, said momentum is growing.

“I have not been involved in a project in my 20 some years here that has got federal support matched by the state of Missouri in a strong bipartisan fashion,” he said.

“People get the vision of reconnecting neighborhoods and community.”

The same day architects on the **South Loop Project** design team were laying out the latest option for the park, advocates were in Jefferson City lobbying for \$15 million in state tax credits to help with private fundraising.



The proposed park would include a pavilion and event lawn that could seat 5,000 people. (Rendering | OJB Landscape Architecture)

So far, the project has lined up \$28.6 million each from the federal and state governments, \$10 million from the city, and \$19 million in private donations.

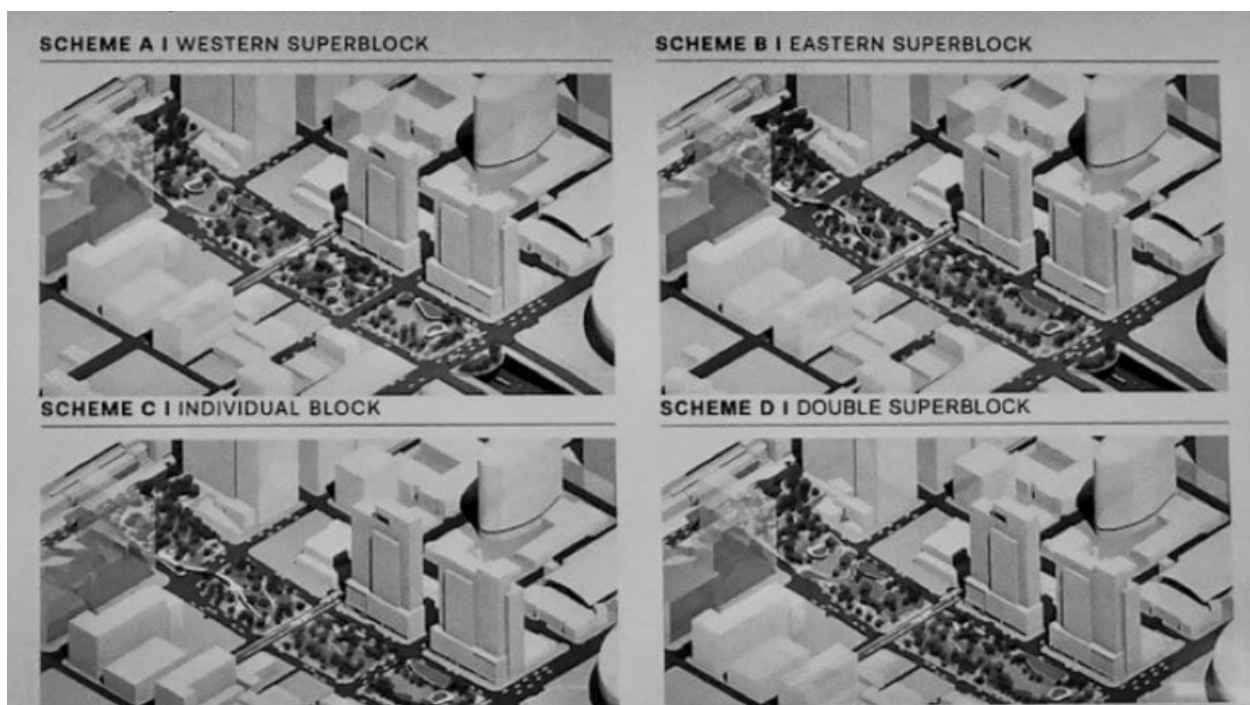
If the tax credits are approved by the Missouri Development Finance Board, it's projected to attract another \$30 million in private support.

As for the latest iterations of the design for the South Loop Link, about 150 people attended a briefing at an event space in the Power & Light District to hear a presentation by architects from OJB Landscape Architecture of Houston and BNIM of Kansas City.

The park would cover I-670 from Wyandotte Street to Grand Boulevard and provide amenities including a performance pavilion and event lawn, play structure for children, a fountain, food hall structure and dog park.

The architects, Nathan Elliott of OJB and Craig Scranton of BNIM, reviewed three options previously presented, and a new option that would close Baltimore Avenue and Walnut Street to create what was called a “double superblock.”

The other options call for closing either Walnut or Baltimore to create more continuous park space, or leaving all the downtown streets open through the area.



Four alternatives for the 4.6-acre park are being considered. (Rendering | Downtown Council presentation)

“One of the things that’s been interesting and generating a lot of discussion is the notion of closing roads,” said Nathan Elliott, a principal at OJB.

“There’s some challenges, but there’s also a lot of opportunities to connect these spaces and make them more meaningful for the city.”

The latest double superblock concept, which would only keep Main Street open through the park, has some streetcar supporters concerned it would cram too much vehicular traffic on the road and hamper streetcar operations.

Tom Gerend, executive director of the Kansas City Streetcar Authority, said his agency is taking a wait-and-see approach.

“The devil is in the details,” Gerend said. “What do the numbers say, what’s the impact and how will it be managed? We’re excited about the project. Let’s see the data and be smart about this.”

While the South Loop Link designs are now 30% complete, many other questions need to be answered including a traffic analysis before a final decision is made. A chart shown at the briefing indicated work on the project could begin in December 2024.

The South Loop Link would be operated by a nonprofit organization that would program the space with activities including performances at the pavilion planned for the event lawn that could accommodate up to 5,000 people.



A rendering of the new option for a South Loop Link park that calls for a ‘double superblock’ that would close Walnut and Baltimore. (Rendering | OJB Landscape Architecture)

Elliott said while there would be entertainment events and places to buy food in the park, it was not intended to compete with the nearby T-Mobile Center and Power & Light District.

“We want to complement what’s happening in the city and not compete,” he said. “That’s been a really important goal of ours.”

He also acknowledged security would be an important component at the South Loop park. A **downtown park** designed by OJB in Omaha experienced problems earlier this summer with **juvenile fights**.

“We definitely know downtown parks need a bit of extra attention to safety and security,” he said. “That means good lighting and also a physical presence.”

OJB designed the **Klyde Warren Park** in Dallas, a park covering part of a downtown freeway that’s considered a model for what’s proposed in Kansas City.

During their presentation, the architects also showed an animated video of one of proposed designs for the 4.6-acre park that you can see **here**.

The public-private team pursuing the South Loop Link is the Downtown Council, **Port KC** and the City of Kansas City.

“I think the design this team is coming up with is truly transformational,” Dietrich said. “We have \$90 million in hand, about half way to where we need to be.”

He said a fundraising effort co-chaired by Jeff Jones, CEO of H&R Block, Edward Merriman of Financial Holding Corp. and Tim Dunn of J.E. Dunn is intended to raise a total of \$75 million in private funding.

All three are involved with projects either completed or proposed near the South Loop freeway that would benefit substantially from covering the loud traffic trench with a park.

H&R Block already has contributed \$10 million to the South Loop Link plan and the Tisch family, the owner of the Loews Convention Hotel, has provided \$5 million.

An additional \$3 million has been pledged by J.E. Dunn, Canadian Pacific Kansas City, the Power & Light District, the Cordish Cos. and 1400 Baltimore, an office building developed for Blue Cross Blue Shield by the Merriman Family.

The Loews hotel overlooks the South Loop as do the Two Light and Three Light apartment towers developed by Cordish, and the 1400 Baltimore building. Cordish and J.E. Dunn also have proposed a 500-unit apartment project on Main just south of I-670.

*Flatland contributor Kevin Collison is the founder of **CityScene KC**, an online source for downtown news and issues.*

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