

NEWEST SOUTH KNOXVILLE PROJECT WILL PRESENT MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE BAKER CREEK BOTTOMS TO BEGIN CONSTRUCTION SOON

by Allie Stoehr

First announced in autumn of last year, formal plans for Baker Creek Bottoms, a multi-faceted community development in South Knoxville, were revealed earlier this month.

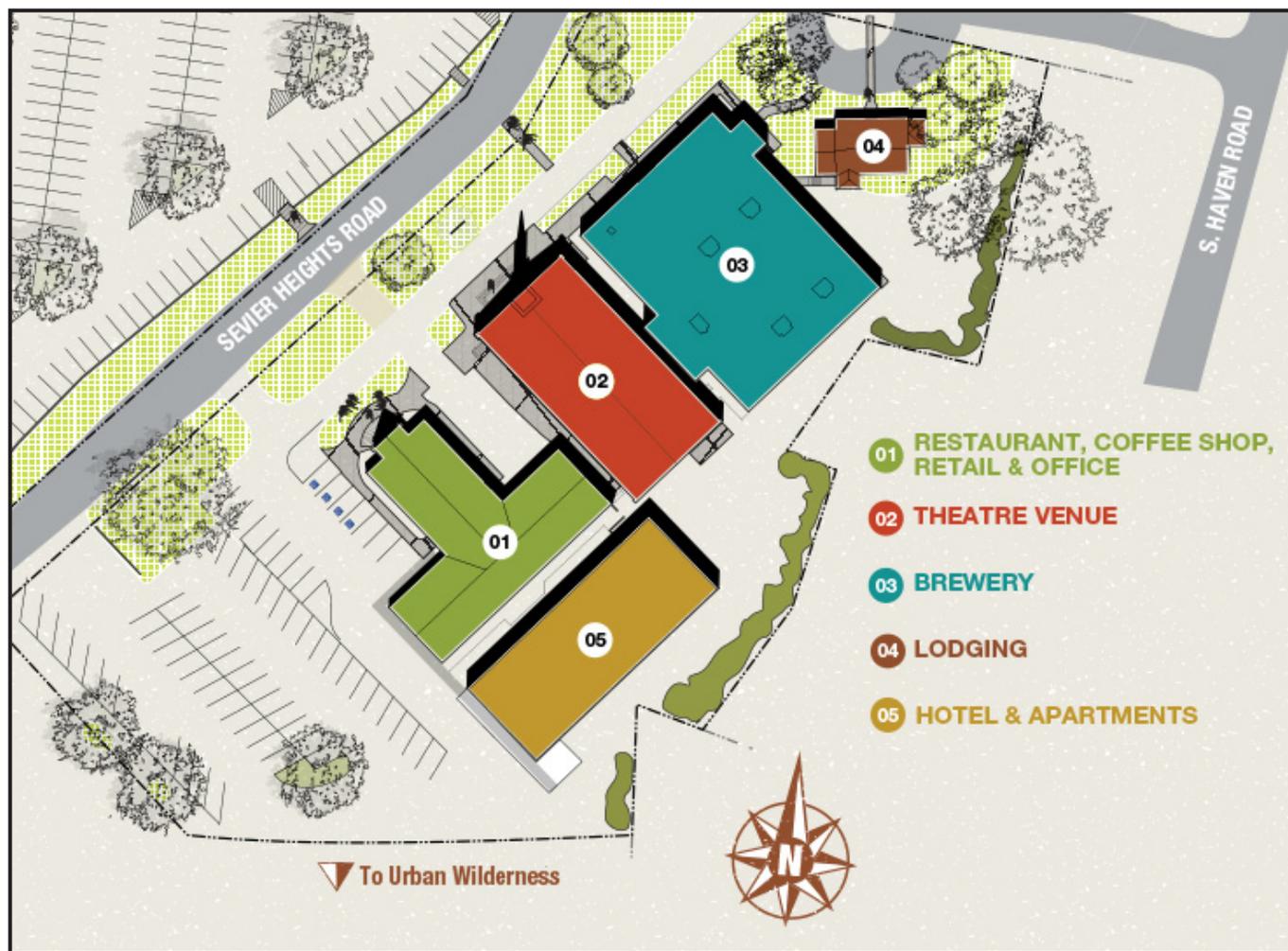
A groundbreaking ceremony took place on August 18, and construction is set to begin before September. The complex is poised to serve as the gateway to the Urban Wilderness, and its campus promises to be a one-stop shop for all things visitors to the area will need and want. Slated to open in the spring of 2018, BCB marks the next step in the city's evolution south of the river.

A veritable showcase of entertainment, hospitality and food services, BCB will include a hotel, brewery, restaurant, coffee shop/juice bar/bakery, bicycle rental shop, performing arts center, music venue, meeting spaces and more – adding an exciting new wave of recreation options to the ever-expanding south side.

We recently met Thomas Krajewski and Tom Weiss at the lot BCB will call home, where we got to hear a bit about their vision for the combined 80,000-square-foot development.

Krajewski and Weiss, along with Michael Wood (principal broker of Wood Realtors and a lifelong South Knoxville resident), are the forces behind the enterprise located where the old Sevier Heights Baptist Church sits, and they are thankful to have the support of multiple sources around Knoxville.

A public meeting in October 2016 was encouraging to Krajewski and Weiss because of the overwhelming support from the surrounding residential communities. Then, after their specific property was rezoned from residential to commercial use, BCB received a \$150,000 grant from the city's Historic Preservation Fund in order to help restore the architecturally significant chapel building built in 1939. In addition, growth and redevelopment of the space have been encouraged and aided by the Community Development Department of the City of Knoxville, by



the Legacy Parks Foundation and by the South Haven Neighborhood Association.

Blighted storefronts across this section of Knoxville are being reimagined and reinvigorated more and more these days, and BCB will be a welcome addition to what quickly is becoming an impressive roster of local businesses. As the district continues to boom, hopefully the former church will flourish in its new role as a sanctuary for both lovers of the great outdoors and South Knoxville denizens. The following is a point-by-point breakdown of the project's components, including insights from its developers.

BICYCLE RENTAL SHOP

One of the first businesses to open at BCB will be the bike rental shop. "Working collaboratively with the cycling community of Knoxville, our goal will be to not be a bike retail shop, but rather a place to rent bicycles for use throughout the Urban Wilderness and the surrounding area," says Krajewski, who will be the owner/operator of the space.

The shop predominantly will rent mountain bikes of various makes and brands, but it also will carry youth bikes. As the James White Parkway project expands and more road biking becomes an option, the shop plans to

rent cruiser bicycles, as well. "We will have something like a weekend pass where renters can access a number of brands to test and see which bikes they prefer," says Krajewski.

Accessories, nutritional snacks and other related items will be offered, as well. The adjoining cafe space also will be convenient to the bike shop, where riders and explorers will have the opportunity to fuel up before they head out the front door to the trailhead for the Baker Creek Preserve.

Another one of Krajewski's plans is to create a cooperative with other retail shops in the city. "Our goal is to integrate with the existing Knoxville bike scene," he says.

“The bikes here will not be for sale, so we’ll be able to send buying customers to existing Knoxville-area bike shops and build community that way.” Krajewski also plans on integrating a vocational bicycle mechanical school into the downstairs space where professionals and enthusiasts alike can learn how to build and repair bicycles.

RESTAURANT, COFFEE SHOP/JUICE BAR/BAKERY

The old chapel will be restored to highlight some of its most beautiful features while being converted into a fully functional restaurant. The upstairs will provide both private and common dining areas totaling up to 7,000 square feet. The developers currently are interviewing local restaurant operators before they settle on a distinctive style. Expect to hear more about this aspect of BCB as construction moves forward.

It should be noted, however, that two stalwarts of the Market Square Farmers’ Market have had extensive discussions concerning the possibility of combining forces and opening in the complex.

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Walking from the entrance of the restaurant out to the right, a courtyard for outdoor dining and evening ambiance will be centered between the old chapel and the slightly newer performing arts venue, which was built in 1952 as a larger sanctuary to the growing church. This venue will be repurposed to host myriad events, from performing arts and concerts to community gatherings and private events. So far, Krajewski and Weiss are unsure as to whether they plan to keep the pews or remove them to provide standing room for larger audiences. With the pews in place, the room can house 650 people.

Sitting atop this building is a tall steeple and a cross. The cross will be moved to a commemorative garden in front of BCB and replaced with a “Q.” The letter will be representative of Arthur Q. Smith Performing Arts Centre, the building’s clever new title. For those who don’t know, Smith was an important song-writer who found his

way to Knoxville in the mid-1930s and who landed a spot on WNOX’s Midday Merry-Go-Round some time later.

An unsung musician with an unhealthy appreciation of the drink, Smith would imbibe at the Three Feathers at the corner of Jackson Avenue and Gay Street from time to time. As he grew more inebriated and needed funds to support his habit, he would sell his songs to patrons and workers at the bar. Some of the era’s most popular songs were purchased for as little as \$15, and Smith was washed clean of the songs’ legacy. But with the “Q” anointing the BCB performance venue, Smith will be forgotten no longer, his namesake firmly planted in the heart of South Knoxville as the neighborhood, too, rediscovers its potential.

BREWERY

It might seem as though a church gymnasium would have limited capacity with regard to being used for another purpose, but, as it turns out, this particular gym will see new life as a brewery upon its restoration. Featuring 10,000 square feet of production space and 2,000 square feet for a tasting room, the finished product of this aspect of the remodel may very well end up being the easiest to enjoy.

An open layout with vaulted ceilings is a good look for the two new alcohol-centric businesses (Pour and PostModern Spirits) in the Jackson Terminal; the cavernous interior of Schulz Brau offers a fun drinking environment, as well. There’s every reason to believe that this space would be conducive to a similar setup. Patrons could enter into the tasting room from outside and look straight into the gym AKA the production area. Also, the gym is lined with an elevated running track that would facilitate brewery tours and offer a unique viewpoint of the brewing process.

HOTEL

Behind the restaurant and retail building is the future site for lodging at BCB. As with the entirety of the complex, the hotel structure’s exterior aesthetics will be updated before any inside improvements take place. Redesign will begin with the first two

floors of the building, which mostly will be converted into rooms. For the time being, the third floor will remain unchanged as the developers eye the possibility for future growth.

The hotel will have up to 75 beds, nearly 30 of which will be shared dorm or hostel-style. There will be luxury rooms available to travelers seeking more private accommodations, as well – making the venture the first boutique hospitality experience in South Knoxville.

OFFICE SPACE

The Parsonage is a one-and-a-half story house with a fully finished basement that sits adjacent to the future brewery. There are several possible uses for the space that are currently being considered. One idea calls for it to be used for storage and office space. Another option discussed is a hub for the Urban Wilderness and surrounding area that disseminates information, houses a kiosk and offers concierge-type services to visitors to the park. Plugging in strategic local offices to tie everything together might be crucial to the community aspect of BCB.

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Weiss explains that all of these spaces are tenant businesses; therefore, they all will be started and finished at different times. The first phase of businesses to open will be the bicycle shop, its incorporated school and the cafe. They are projected to open next spring.

The character of the property will change dramatically with the restoration of the buildings and the plans to beautify the landscaping surrounding BCB. Art will play a vital role in the embellishment of the area, and – in line with the vision of BCB – all of it will be local and focused on South Knoxville.

Near BCB, the city is now evaluating design proposals and selecting a design team to transform the James White Parkway termination area.

Overall, the support from the City of Knoxville, Legacy Parks Foundation and surrounding neighborhoods has been overwhelming. “The city has been incredibly cooperative,” says Weiss. “They want to see us succeed as much

as we do. We are an important component of the Urban Wilderness, and we are delighted with the cooperation of the mayor’s able staff and everyone else involved.”

Knox County also is investing in South Knoxville, as it aims to redevelop the old football stadium at South-Doyle Middle School into a premier BMX park. With the support and guidance of Visit Knoxville, it could host regional and national BMX events, bringing patrons to BCB businesses and guests to its hotel, all the while exposing a long-overlooked part of town to a world ready to see what South Knoxville has to offer.

Monitor the development’s progress at www.bakercreekbottoms.com.

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