

Seeds of development sprouting north of Liberty



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Two new businesses will open in the next few months at Findlay Market and the developments may reflect more than cravings for barbecued ribs and homemade chocolates.

It's also the latest sign that redevelopment may be coming to the next key spot in Over-the-Rhine – the blocks north of Liberty Street that so far have largely missed the neighborhood's housing and retail revival.

For more than a decade, developers have plowed hundreds of millions of dollars into the neighborhood south of Liberty Street bordering Downtown. Now, fortunes may be starting to turn north, drawn by the streetcar's development, a growing brewery district and rising real estate costs south of Liberty.

More activity would be welcome news to Findlay Market – a community anchor for a neighborhood anxious to shed its downtrodden image.

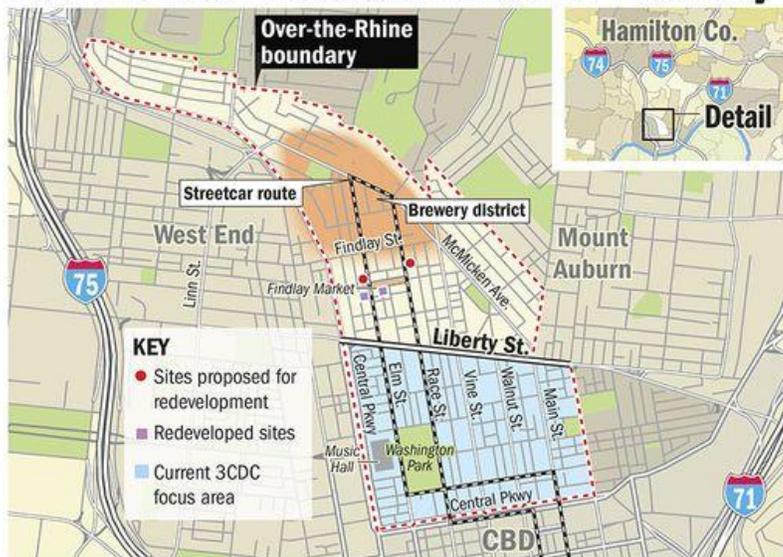
The market's nonprofit operator and city officials last week held a press conference to announce that Eli's BBQ and Maverick Chocolate Co. will open soon in newly redeveloped storefronts.

And in the next few years, more tenants are expected to fill more redeveloped spaces as part of a resurgent retail district between Elm and Race streets, said Joe Hansbauer, president and chief executive of the Corporation for Findlay Market.

"People believe there is positive energy moving in that direction," said Greg Olson, president and chief executive of Over-the-Rhine developer Urban Sites. Development south of Liberty has proven so successful that most early critics have been quelled, he said.

"People saw what happened south of Liberty, and most people missed (it)," said Olson, whose firm has developed about 250 housing units and manages more than 330 in that part of Over-the-Rhine.

OTR rehab moves north of Liberty



Story Highlights

New Findlay Market businesses may signal return of Over-the-Rhine development north of Liberty.

Findlay Market serving as community anchor interested in outward neighborhood development.

Neighborhood eyeing rebirth of retail district, new housing

Photo: The Enquirer/Randy Mazzola)

"They say to themselves, 'I don't want to miss out on an opportunity north of Liberty.'"

Vine Street, south of Liberty in the Gateway Quarter of Over-the-Rhine, has seen a tremendous amount of redevelopment.

Building a market

So far, redevelopment north of Liberty is spotty at best. The neighborhood there includes more than 200 vacant buildings, according to John Deatrick, Cincinnati's streetcar project executive.

The neighborhood is dotted with old industrial buildings and warehouses in a significant state of disrepair, yet many of those properties house businesses ranging from woodworking shops to product design studios to tire stores. Well-tended homes are interspersed among many neglected ones. Barricades have been erected on McMicken Avenue to deter prostitution and other illicit activity.

The Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC), the largest developer in Over-the-Rhine, isn't talking about its plans north of Liberty. Spokeswoman Anastasia Mileham said the group still has a lot of work remaining on projects to the south.

3CDC's ongoing efforts there include an office-and-retail project at 15th and Vine streets and a \$25 million project at 15th and Race streets to add 300 parking spaces, 57 apartments and more commercial space.

Still, it's no secret that 3CDC has purchased properties north of Liberty, including the Globe Furniture Building on Elm Street, with an eye toward redeveloping them.

Kim Starbuck and her husband Kevin Pape are among the newer pioneers north of Liberty. They bought the Crown Building, across Elm Street from Findlay Market, in 2011. A lot of sweat equity later, the couple now benefits from the increased interest being shown around the market.

Their building's upper office and apartment spaces are fully leased, they say. And Pape said the couple is in talks to fill the restaurant space on the building's first level.

Bobby Maly, chief operating officer of the Model Group, another major Over-the-Rhine developer, also believes in opportunities around Findlay Market.

Maly said he's in the "very early stages" of looking at possible projects near the market on Race Street. It may take up to five years, he said, but the area's walkability, proximity to the market and urban core cachet will help make it an attractive place to live.

"Just like we thought Pendleton (south of Liberty) was going to be a good neighborhood, we think (north of Liberty) is going to be a pretty strong area for commercial and residential," Maly said.

"The neighborhood's got a long way to go, but I'm sure it's going to happen."

Elias Leisring, co-owner of Eli's BBQ, said that in time, he expects to see more nearby housing developed because costs per square foot will be cheaper than south of Liberty.

"It's just a matter of time," Leisring said. He expects to open his restaurant during evening hours, after Findlay Market's other tenants have closed. That, too, could be a drawing card for development.

"For there to be nowhere to eat late (north of Liberty) is pretty crazy," he said.

Business is booming for Rhinegeist Brewery at 1910 Elm St. and in 10 months of operation, it has grown from five to 30 employees, said Bob Bonder, the brewery's 33-year-old co-founder. Every Saturday, 1,500 people visit, he said, showing how viable the neighborhood businesses could be.

"People are starting to appreciate and understand the assets we have up here," said Steve Hampton, executive director of the Over-the-Rhine nonprofit that aims to preserve and help develop the area's Brewery District.

Adjacent to the brewery, the city is building its streetcar maintenance facility. Deatrick, the streetcar director, said the project's impact is already being felt. No longer do any tax-delinquent properties line the route, he said.

Mary Burke Rivers, executive director of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, said rising costs for real estate in Over-the-Rhine's southern section have made it difficult to consider new, affordable housing there.

But she said care must be taken as efforts move north. Creating more market-rate rental and single-family housing is good, she said, so long as it doesn't outprice current neighbors and lead to their exodus, too.

Area residents are also working on plans to gain support for and pursue a plan to reduce the width of Liberty Street so that the two sides of Over-the-Rhine could become better connected.

Grand strategy: Demolition, preservation and construction

Other challenges also await development north of Liberty.

Generally, 3CDC's objectives have been threefold: help stop criminal activity; clean up and secure vacant properties and lots; and work on a plan that includes creating great civic spaces, mixed-use structures, and a mixed-income neighborhood. The strategy involves some combination of building demolition, preservation and construction.

The 2002 Over-the-Rhine comprehensive plan calls for the neighborhood to be "economically and racially diverse community that can be sustained over the long term."

No one disagrees that the strategy will take time north of Liberty. Still, the Corporation for Findlay Market's Hansbauer noted that a market district from Central Parkway to Vine Street thrived with a full-service grocery, cobblers, four furniture stores and other pop-up retail shops a half-century ago.

Today, he said, a vital neighborhood will need not only a diverse mix of retail businesses, but office workers and residents as well.

Cincinnati Vice Mayor David Mann is optimistic about the neighborhood's future. He said the activity at Findlay Market is important to instilling confidence in future growth.

"There's a synergism between this and what's happening in Over-the-Rhine," Mann said.



(Photo: The Enquirer/Cara Owsley)

<http://www.cincinnati.com/story/money/2014/05/06/north-liberty-development/8791783/>