

Water Walk, Town Square to honor St. George's past

By Nancy Perkins
Deseret Morning News

ST. GEORGE — A new look destined for Main Street is designed to capture old memories — blending the charm of the historic with amenities of the present.

"This project celebrates the history of St. George," said city spokesman Marc Mortensen. "The city is investing a significant amount in the downtown heart of the city and the response has been very positive."

Design plans for the St. George Town Square and Historic Water Walk on Main Street, a nine-acre, \$4.2 million project, were unveiled in early October. Funding for the major reconstruction effort is coming from redevelopment agency funds, said Mortensen.

"This whole thing has been a huge partnership between the city, school district and county," he said. "It's really a model for the rest of the state on how different government interests can work together for a common goal."

Major construction won't start until the spring of 2007, although crews should begin

work on a nature park on the north end of Main Street at Brooks Pond this winter.

Washington County plans to demolish the existing library on Main Street to make room for the central-plaza portion of the project and rebuild the library on 100 South. The groundbreaking for the new library, which will be rebuilt using an historical facade, is today.

"The Historic Water Walk on Main and the town square will truly celebrate the area's proud pioneer heritage and act as a catalyst for revival in the downtown historic district," said St. George Mayor Dan McArthur, who can trace his own heritage back to the settlement of Utah's Dixie.

Designed by GSBS, an architectural and planning firm in Salt Lake City, the town-square project will feature festival and parade grounds, an amphitheater, splash pad, and a bell tower. Statues and plaques honoring the pioneers of St. George will eventually dot the town square.

"Our goal was to create a town center with shade and water where citizens and visitors could gather and where

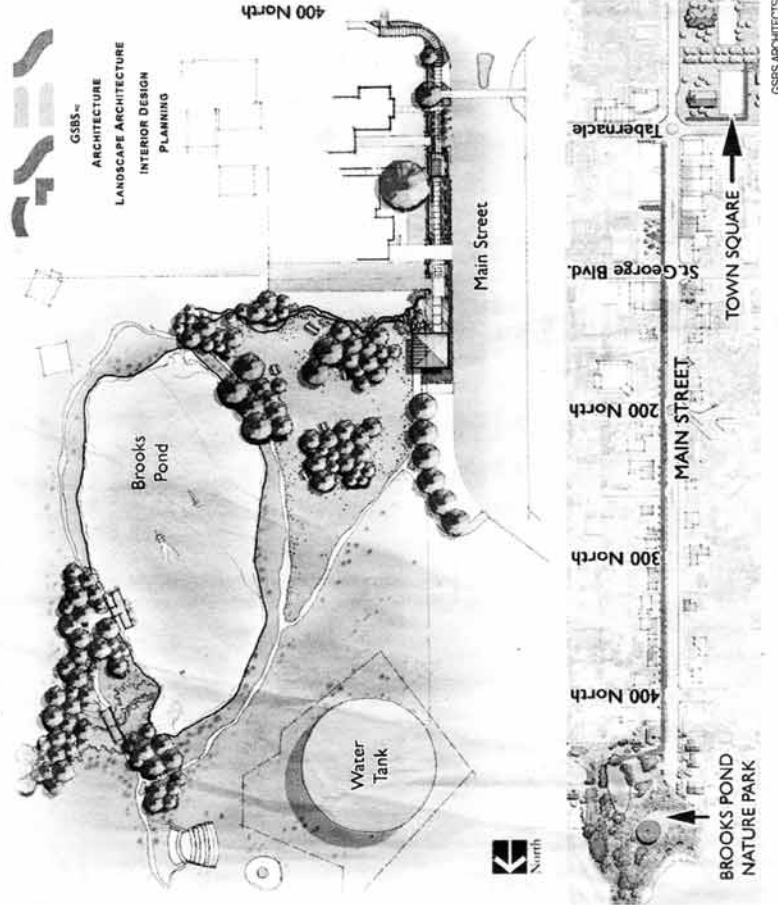
special events could be celebrated," said Bruce Jorgensen, landscape architect with GSBS. The Water Walk will meander from the north end of the town square for about 6,000 feet along Main Street until it reaches the new nature park at Brooks Pond just below Skyline Drive.

"The inspiration for the flowing water west of the bell tower is the confluence of the Santa Clara and Virgin rivers," said Jorgensen.

Brooks Pond was an old watering hole for area children and a steady source of irrigation water used by those living downhill. In those days children would float leaves and race paper boats in the irrigation ditches that lined neighborhood streets.

During a telephone interview in July, 88-year-old Wayne Whitehead, who died Oct. 8, recalled those days and the simple joys of a childhood in Dixie.

"We had a couple mud holes up on the hill that would fill up with irrigation water and a lot of ponds around town like Brooks pond and Watson pond," said Whitehead, who helped his father make ice and



The St. George Town Square and Historic Water Walk on Main Street is a nine-acre, \$4.2 million project.

deliver it around town during those blistering hot summer days. "We would play in those to cool off. And we played baseball, too. What else was there?"

The water at Brooks Pond has been off limits to children for years, though, along with other spring-fed ponds in the area. That's why the nature park planned for the grounds around Brooks Pond will be such a nice trip down memory lane for so many people, Mortensen said.

"That's what we want, it's what it's going to be used for," he said. "This project celebrates the history of St. George. It's a way to memorialize people who helped build the city and make it what it is today."

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