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## **Making Gaines 'It's time to turn some dirt'**

The 22nd floor of the Florida Capitol was an appropriate setting for Tuesday's announcement that the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is giving a \$375,000 grant — \$150,000 more than requested — to help Tallahassee transform Gaines Street from mundane to, in time, magnificent.

The breathtaking panoramic view from the Capitol's top floor gives one a strong sense of our community's beauty as well as its potential, including that run-down district a few blocks south called the Gaines Street Corridor. The ongoing effort to remake Gaines is, in fact, all about possibilities.

Visionaries for years have dreamed that Gaines could be a funky arts and entertainment district where artists, urban dwellers and others could live and work, and that could become an incubator for local arts-related businesses.

But big dreams like this one become reality only with a lot of hard work, persistence and big bucks — not only actual dollars contributed, as in the case of the Knight Foundation grant, but also "in-kind" contributions of expertise.

This is where Minneapolis-based Artspace Projects, the nationwide nonprofit real-estate agent for the arts, comes in. Artspace, in partnership with the Knight Foundation, the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA), local and state governments and two state universities, could finally be the straw that stirs Gaines Street's drink — and the community's.

From dream to done deal

Tuesday's announcement was an important step toward converting "could" to "will." The Knight Foundation money is going specifically for "pre-development" of the Arts on Gaines project, several years in the works by local arts advocates.

As Democrat Staff Writer Julian Pecquet reported Monday, Arts on Gaines is envisioned as a mixed-use development where artists live, work and hold exhibits; where organizations and businesses devoted to the arts share space and ideas, an incubator for arts-related commerce and creativity; and where an eclectic collection of restaurants and retail stores serves a bustling clientele.

A model of neighborhood revitalization.

But the dream extends beyond bricks and mortar. Remaking Gaines Street could be a catalyst for remaking Tallahassee in ways that many for years have openly hoped for.

An important gateway from the airport. A bridge to downtown and state government. A bridge, almost literally, between Florida A&M and Florida State universities. A "perfect connection" in so many ways, as Mike Pate, the Knight Foundation's local program manager and former Tallahassee Democrat publisher, described Tuesday.

Those connections were illustrated by the presence of representatives from COCA (Executive Director Peggy Brady); the city (Mayor John Marks); the county (Commissioner Bryan Desloge); the state (Secretary of State Kurt Browning); FAMU (Pharmacy Dean Henry Lewis III); and FSU (Vice President for University Relations Lee Hinkle).

Mr. Marks praised the project's potential for enhancing the arts, but said it was particularly important to the economic health of the community. "It's time to turn some dirt," the mayor said in his public remarks.

Like a puzzle

After Tuesday's news conference, Mr. Marks described investment interest in Gaines as "about to pop," adding that he hoped private development and public-private partnerships like the one with Artspace could "fit together." That's crucial because one location, at Gaines and Gay streets, already has been identified as the preferred site for Arts on Gaines. A residential developer is offering \$4.1 million for that same 4.5-acre parcel, so it's important to note that project supporters haven't excluded other potential sites.

"All our eggs were not put into that basket," said Greg Handberg, Artspace's vice president for properties.

There's still a lot that needs to happen before the Gaines Street Corridor, and perhaps our community along with it, are truly transformed. But the process just took a great leap forward.