

THE BANKS

Quarterly Review | April–June 2026

The Named Gardens of Smale Riverfront Park

Plus:

Walking Together at Juneteenth Jubilee • Master Plan Update
Special Features • And more!





Letter from The Banks Project Executive, Phil Beck

The Second Quarter witnessed the culmination of 13 months of collaboration resulting in The Banks Urban Design Plan Update, which won City Council’s approval for the concept and the necessary zoning amendments to guide implementation. To accomplish this feat, Hamilton County and City of Cincinnati officials partnered with key stakeholders of The Banks and a team assembled by Perkins&Will to provide essential professional and public perspectives on what The Banks could—and must—become to continue economic growth and sustain its impact. The City and County now focus on drafting a Request for Qualifications to be used in the process of selecting a Master Developer for the five remaining lots at The Banks.

Smale Riverfront Park transformed this quarter from the dormant greenspace of first quarter, to the lush and inviting gardens, walkways, and lawns of April, May, and June. And since “Smale” is not the only name you’ll encounter at Smale Riverfront Park, check out the tour of “named gardens” currently found there.

Inside this report, you’ll find photos and captions highlighting events located in and around Smale Riverfront Park, and the month-by-month chronicle of signature events within and around The Banks: Flying Pig events, Juneteenth along Freedom Way; Reds baseball and World Cup soccer, Black Music Month, and announcement of the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame 2026 inductees.

Now that the Smale Park splash pads are activated, and events and entertainment abound, we hope you follow the sun and visit The Banks often this summer!

Phil Beck, AIA, LEED AP
The Banks Public Partnership Project Executive

Engage. Educate. Entertain.

THE BANKS

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2

Smale Riverfront Park's Named Gardens

"Smale" Isn't the Only Name You'll Find in Smale Riverfront Park

5

Walking Together

Juneteenth 2026 Celebrates the Impact of History

7

The Banks Urban Design Plan Update

A Future Envisioned, A Reality Embraced

PLUS

9 Current Events 14 What's Next



Photography by Joan Buttner and Marie Gemelli-Carroll

Smale Riverfront Park's Named Gardens

“Smale” Isn’t the Only Name You’ll
Find in Smale Riverfront Park



The 45-acre greenspace located at The Banks has been known as Smale Riverfront Park since 2012. Named in honor of long-time Cincinnati Parks supporters John G. Smale and Phyllis W. Smale, this award-winning park is a year-round attraction for its gardens, its views, its rolling lawns dotted with playgrounds and playscapes, and its special events produced by Cincinnati Parks and the Cincinnati Parks Foundation.

Former Procter & Gamble CEO, John Smale, and his family are responsible for securing the future of Smale Riverfront Park for generations to enjoy this gem in the crown of Cincinnati's Parks. Yet "Smale" is not the only name you'll find as you explore this Riverfront Park (Yeatman's Cove, Sawyer Point, and Theodore M. Berry International Friendship Park complete the City of Cincinnati Riverfront Parks along the Ohio River).

Entering Smale Park at the far eastern perimeter (at Mehring Way and Main Street), visitors will encounter five named parks-within-Smale Park, in this order:

- Duke Energy Garden, made possible by the Duke Energy Foundation
- Cathy's Garden, honoring Cathy Smale Caldemeyer
- Women's Committee Garden, recognizing The Women's Committee of Cincinnati Parks
- Memory Garden, supported by Omnicare a CVS Health Company and Alzheimer's Association
- Gardner Family Grove & Rose Garden, established by The James J. and Joan A. Gardner Family Foundation

Named Gardens (cont'd)

Duke Energy Garden



Women's Committee Garden



Cathy's Garden



Women's Committee Garden



Memory Garden



Gardner Family Grove & Rose Garden



As you explore the named gardens throughout Smale Riverfront Park, you'll discover vibrant, wildlife-friendly landscapes centered on native plants that support birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. Unique features such as Cathy's Kaleidoscope, located in The Women's Committee Garden, blend nature and art, inviting visitors to experience colorful plant patterns through three distinctive viewfinders. The Duke Energy Garden is an accredited Monarch Waystation, featuring milkweed and late-season nectar plants that provide essential habitat for migrating monarch butterflies. From the diverse woody and herbaceous perennial plantings of the Memory Garden to the winding, shaded stone path through the drought-tolerant landscape of Cathy's Garden and the classic Gardner Family Grove and Rose Garden, Smale Riverfront Park offers a rich variety of garden experiences that delight visitors in every season.

Photo credits: Cincinnati Parks Foundation and Joan Buttner

[!\[\]\(4f6bf54ae7e4144a72d78316053e412d_img.jpg\) Learn more about Smale Riverfront Park](#)

Walking Together

Juneteenth 2026 Celebrates the Impact of History



Juneteenth celebrations at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center combined education, remembrance, and community with Opal's Walk for Freedom and the Freedom Center's Juneteenth Jubilee. This year, Cincinnati was among one of only 10 cities nationwide selected to host Opal's Walk for Freedom, a national initiative inspired by the legacy of Dr. Opal Lee, widely known as the "Grandmother of Juneteenth" for her tireless advocacy for recognizing June 19 as a federal holiday.

Opal's Walk for Freedom brought communities together through simultaneous 2.5-mile walks in Washington, D.C. (the flagship city), Fort Worth (the original home of the Freedom Walk), Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Birmingham, Honolulu, Evanston, Detroit, St. Paul, and Grants Pass, Oregon. The 2.5-mile distance symbolizes the two and a half years between the Emancipation Proclamation and the day enslaved people in Texas learned they were free.

In addition to rallying the hundreds participating in the local Opal's Walk, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center hosted its Juneteenth Jubilee, featuring live entertainment, food trucks, music, an outdoor market, performances by Skate Downtown Cincy and the Ijo Ugo Drummers, and a panel discussion with *The Lion King* cast.

Freedom Center President and COO Woody Keown welcomed visitors, walkers, and volunteers before introducing Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus, who shared the history of Opal's Walk and encouraged attendees to reflect on the enduring significance of Juneteenth as a federal holiday.

Photo credits: National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

 [Visit FreedomCenter.org](https://freedomcenter.org)

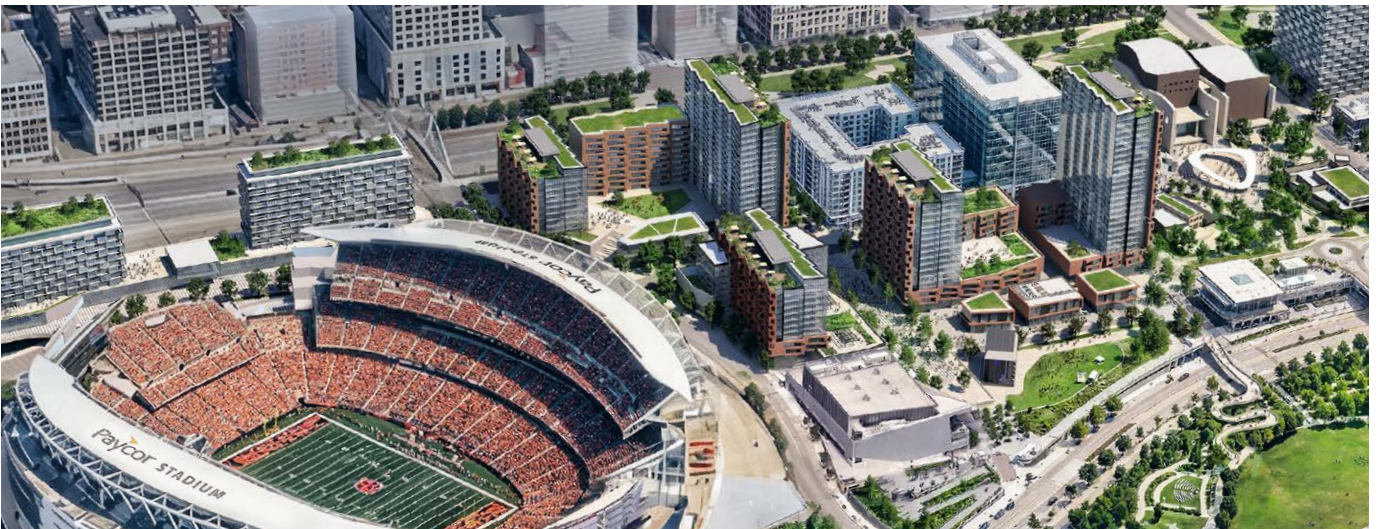
"Dr. Lee's lifelong mission to unite America around truth and justice has made her a living symbol of our shared values of courage, cooperation, and perseverance."

Woody Keown, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Freedom Center

The Banks Urban Design Plan Update

A Future Envisioned, A Reality Embraced





The highlight of the second quarter 2026 was Cincinnati City Council approval of an ordinance and zoning amendment on June 10, confirming the vision articulated in The Banks Urban Design Plan Update developed with the help of consultants, city and county staff, and key stakeholders of The Banks. The consulting team, led by Perkins&Will, included MKSK, HR&A Advisors, and Kolar Design. Support of the Steering Committee and Advisory Group was key to the quality and timeliness of the Plan Update. While consultant and stakeholder involvement was essential, the Plan Update would not have met its goal without those who engaged in the Public Input process by offering opinions across two polls.

Adoption of recommendations on development of the remaining five lots in The Banks footprint underscores the need and the desire to invest in The Banks for increased economic impact. In addition to identifying a Master Developer, securing funding for capping Fort Washington Way between Walnut and Vine Streets between Second and Third Streets remains a priority. Officials from Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati meet regularly to fashion an effective and efficient process of dialogue and decision-making to ensure not only clarity of vision, but also maintaining focus on operational safety, inclusive opportunity, within-budget operation, and community engagement.

[!\[\]\(e3f8612927870f2e0f9f5989e6dd3064_img.jpg\) Review The Banks Urban Design Plan Update](#)

[!\[\]\(003082e50e3009141f59bd5df831749f_img.jpg\) View the Public Input Polls](#)

CURRENT EVENTS



Miles feel easier when enjoying the route lined with spring flowers during the Bloom Zoom 5K.



Families were invited to pick up free trees and visit the mobile petting zoo during the Arbor Day celebrations.



Photo provided by Cincinnati Parks Foundation

Splash pads offer relief from extreme heat and humidity.

CURRENT EVENTS (cont'd)



Powered by passion and a pig, runners are determined to finish at the Flying Pig Marathon.



Paycor Stadium renovation workers were rewarded with a well-deserved lunch for their commitment to maintaining work safety.



Cooling off in the brook at Smale Riverfront Park.



Guests enjoyed views, vibes, and rosé at the Cincy Rosé Wine Festival.

CURRENT EVENTS (cont'd)

Photo credit: The Banks Cincy



Celebrating United States Men's National Team wins at the Soccer Viewing Village Watch Parties.



The Cincinnati Pride Parade filled Freedom Way with vibrant energy.



Photo provided by Messer Construction

Working on improvements to keep people moving at Paycor Stadium.

CURRENT EVENTS (cont'd)



The Banks goes bananas for the Savannah Bananas.



Family enjoys a quiet spot in the shade.



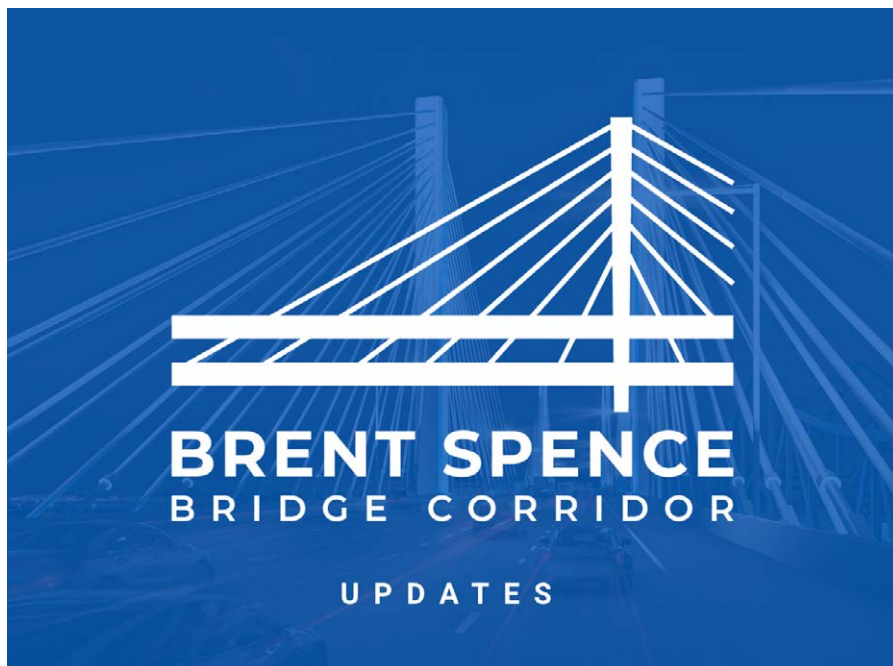
A little curiosity and a friendly turtle at Smale Family Fun Days.



Elevated planters take shape in the Lot 23 park at the ICON Festival Stage in Smale Riverfront Park.



The Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame announced its 2026 inductees—Heatwave and WCIN-AM Radio—with the official induction ceremony scheduled for Saturday, July 25, at 12:00 p.m. at the Brady Center at The Banks. The Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame also partnered with the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library to unveil a new exhibit at the Main Library, featuring commemorative posters and four Black Music Walk of Fame inductees. 54,407 visitors from Jan–Jun '26 (400,556 total visitors to date) have enjoyed the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame. [🔗](#)



The long-awaited solution to traffic issues on the Brent Spence Bridge began in May when the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KTC) broke ground on the first phase of construction for the companion bridge to the Brent Spence. With that announcement, ODOT and KTC launched a robust website providing traffic and travel advisories for travelers whose trips will be impacted by construction.

Get travel advisories that impact The Banks [🔗](#)

Access all travel advisories and construction updates directly [🔗](#)

WHAT'S NEXT



Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame

Here is a sampling of the activities along the riverfront:

JULY

Cincinnati Burger Week

July 13–19 [🔗](#)

Cincinnati Music Festival

July 23–25 [🔗](#)

Festival513

July 24 & 25 [🔗](#)

Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame Induction Ceremony

Celebrating Heatwave and WCIN-AM Radio on July 25 [🔗](#)

Queen City 5k

July 25 [🔗](#)

Bengals Training Camp

Kicks off July 29 [🔗](#)

AUGUST

Smale Family Fun Days

1st Thursday of June/July/Aug [🔗](#)

Music at the Esplanade

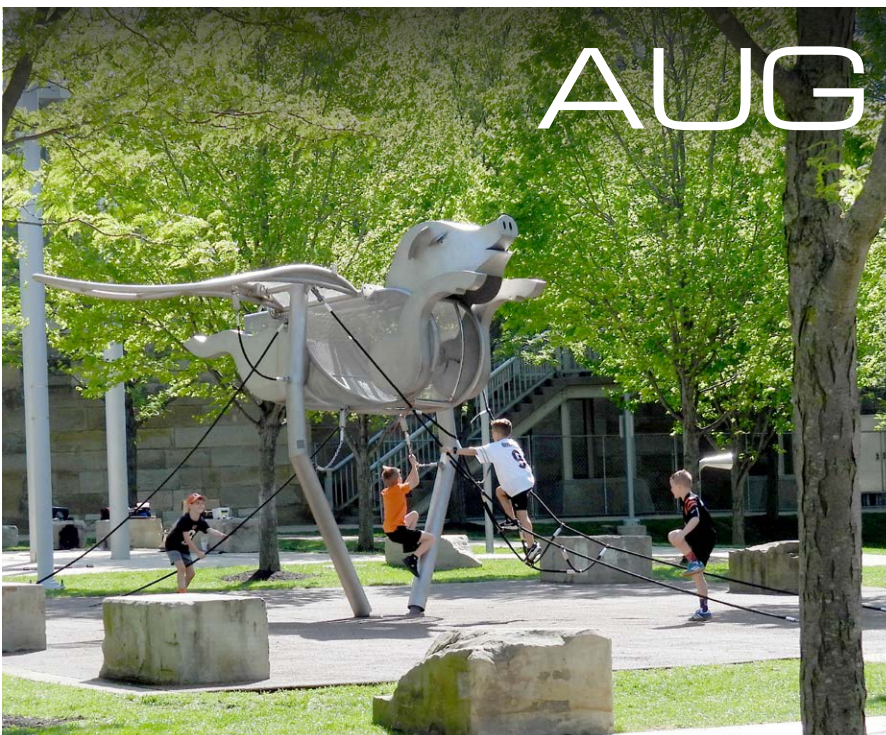
Saturdays through August [🔗](#)

Bengals Free Stadium Practice

August 7 [🔗](#)

Bengals First Pre-Season Home Game

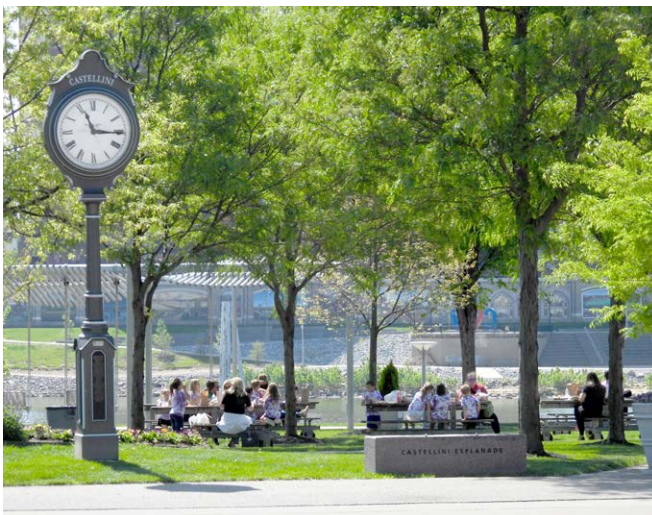
August 13 [🔗](#)



P&G go Vibrantscape in Smale Riverfront Park



Great American Ball Park



Castellini Esplanade in Smale Riverfront Park



Labyrinth in Smale Riverfront Park

SEPTEMBER

Smale, Mind, and Body

Wednesdays from June through September 🌀

Last Rockin' the Roebling Concert of the Season

September 10 🌀

Bengals Regular Season Kickoff: Open in Orange!

September 13 🌀

Final Outdoor Concert of the Season at ICON Festival Stage

September 16 🌀

Reds Last Regular Season Home Game

September 20 🌀

Photo credit: Hamilton County



Residents, elected officials, and community leaders from Bernalillo County, New Mexico, enjoyed the Rosenberg Swings during a tour of The Banks.



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Interested in the latest progress statistics at The Banks? [Click here for current and historical data.](#)