

The Future Of St. Louis' Gateway Arch

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In a bid to revive the city's downtown and riverfront, some St. Louis officials want to reclaim some of the 91 pastoral acres now dedicated for the Gateway Arch National Park.

"When a group of prominent St. Louisans persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to convert 37 blocks of riverfront real estate into a national park, it was a coup that embodied the spirit of the New Deal Era.

Federal money would be used to clear away struggling warehouses. The city would have a peaceful oasis from the bustle of downtown. The country would have a national park and, eventually, an iconic monument, to commemorate its westward expansion.

Now, more than 70 years later, another prominent group of St. Louisans has a new deal of its own for the federal government: Give some of the land back.

Last week, former U.S. Sen. John Danforth — whose family foundation spent \$2 million studying how to revive the riverfront — announced his conclusion that nothing major can be done without first taking local control of some of the 91 acres surrounding the Gateway Arch.

"Right now, we're stuck," Danforth said. "And I want to get unstuck."

Reinventing structures has played a key role in shaping the city's present. But changing the Arch grounds will take more than converting an old shoe factory into ritzy lofts.

The upcoming debate will focus on what role the area's most revered symbol can play in the future of St. Louis' downtown.

Should a treasured landscape become a catalyst for a new riverfront? Should it be left alone, as Roosevelt intended? And what exactly does St. Louis want in its downtown?"