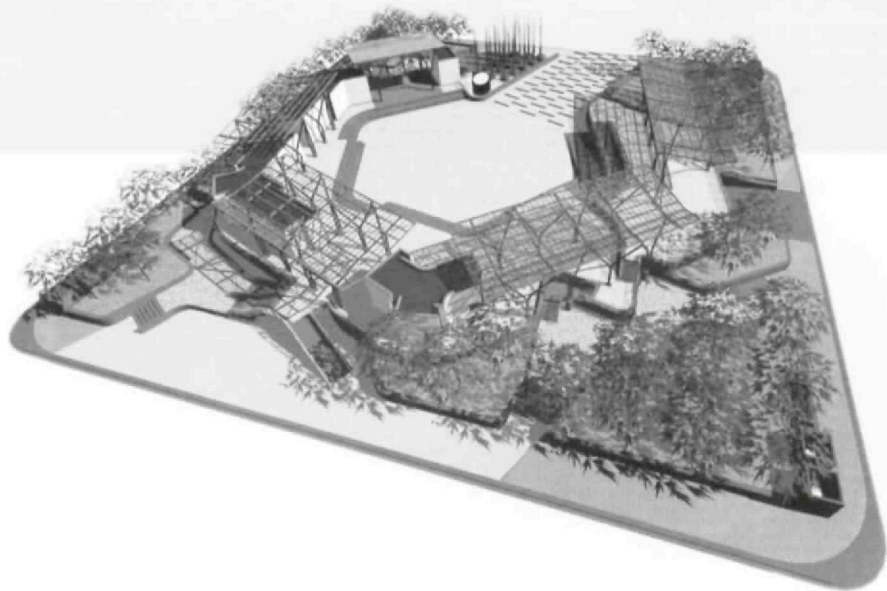


JONES PLAZA MAKEOVER BEGINS



Top and above: Renderings of a remade Jones Plaza, showing relocated greenery and new stage.

IT MAY HAVE BEEN A FEW DAYS LATE, but at least it won't be more than a few dollars short.

In August, after more than a year's delay, work finally began on the renovation of Jones Plaza. Construction crews moved into the square that sits at the heart of Houston's theater district and began ripping it apart, removing trees, tearing up expanses of concrete, and in general clearing the way for a radical rethinking of the space, a rethinking that city officials hope will help bring life to what has long been one of the more moribund parts of downtown.

Generally empty except during planned events, Jones Plaza came to be viewed as a serious problem as the area around it began to boom. The Houston architectural firm of Willis, Bricker & Cannady was hired to come up with a new design for the square, a design that included a permanent stage and concession stand, replacing the concrete

staircases at the four corners with greenery, and lowering the plaza's height a few feet. Once the scheme was approved, though, it sat in limbo as questions were raised about the \$5 million cost of the project. A start date of May 1999 was pushed back to fall 1999, then spring 2000 as different budgets were prepared, slashing various elements of the proposed renovation.

But when the final reduced plan was presented to the city, says project design architect Mark Wamble, the decision was made to return to the original concept and original budget. Only one element of the initial design has been left out — decorating the plaza's air vents and stair housings with poster boxes. And that, says Wamble, can easily be added later if extra funds are raised. Currently, the anticipated completion date of the new Jones Plaza is spring or summer 2001. —*MJShields*



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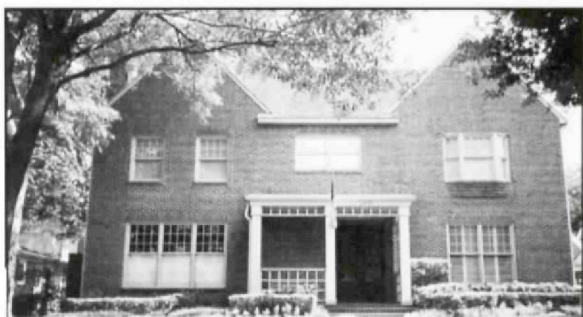
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