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RDA completes purchase of 198 acres for Smiley Heights

By [Steve Sanoski](#)

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Roughly one year after the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority began working with 11 nonprofits to purchase land from them for the proposed Smiley Heights development in Mid City, the authority closed Tuesday on 198 acres for \$1.96 million.

"It was extremely difficult, as you might imagine, just to acquire the property, considering there were 11 different owners and five different tracts that make up those 200 acres," says Walter Monsour, redevelopment authority president and CEO. "The property owners had to be very cooperative on a number of fronts, and fortunately for us, all of them were excited about our vision for the property."

The vision certainly is ambitious. Described as an "urban traditional neighborhood development," Smiley Heights is a mix of education institutions—in partnership with Baton Rouge Community College and the local school district—as well as retail, commercial and residential developments. Eighty-six of the acres are to be preserved as wetlands, with trails for hiking and biking.

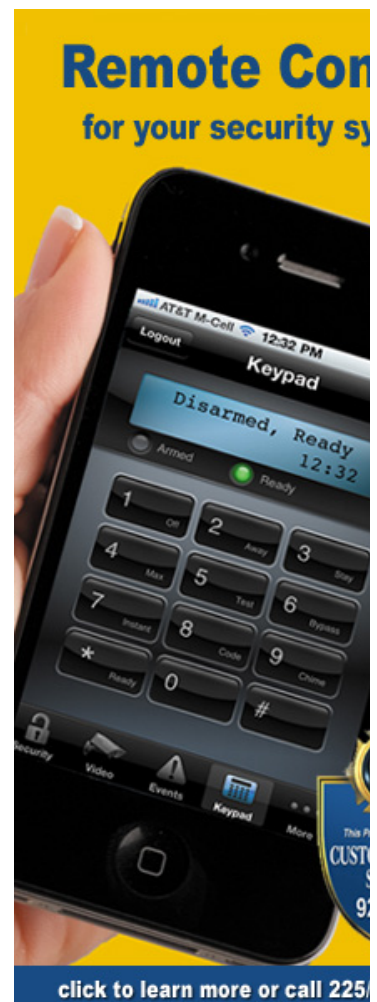
With the land in hand, Monsour says the redevelopment authority will now begin looking for a master developer for the project.

"We will begin working on a request for proposals for a master developer to see how the developers of the world would come in and take our vision and build out the whole property," he says. "I would say we're looking at six to nine months to develop the RFP, get [proposals] returned, evaluate them and begin negotiations."

Monsour says professional consultants who have worked on projects similar to Smiley Heights will also be hired to assist in finding a master developer.

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The sellers of the 198 acres are: Tulane University (50%), Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center (24%), Istrouma Area Council, Boy Scouts of America (3.9%), and Our Lady of the Lake, Baton Rouge Medical Center, LSU Foundation, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Bob Jones University, Evergreen Presbyterian Ministries, French Camp Academy and Shriner's Hospital for Children (all at 2.7%).

In April 2011, the Metro Council OK'd using \$1.5 million of a disaster recovery grant to partner with the redevelopment authority in purchasing the land. Monsour says the rest of the money for the land came from an East Baton Rouge Mortgage

Finance Authority grant.

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