



Friday night in Birmingham's theater district was the kind of event more people will claim to have attended than were actually there in the coming years. Considering there were at least 1,000 people gathered in Birmingham's theater district to watch [the Lyric's](#) marquee rejoin the central business district's landscape, it may be hard to tell those actual attendees from those who weren't.

One statement continues to play at the end of my internal conversations about the first installment of [REVIVE Birmingham](#), [REV Birmingham's](#) street life project, one probably cheesy but true, "The marquee being lit for the first time will make it real."

The five-week series is an opportunity for passersby to see what this city is becoming, filling currently vacant portions of a commercial district with retail concepts and hope. Potential investors may not get to check it out in person (though they probably should), but all the pictures shared online speak loudly and could be the necessary nudge to get those on the fence interested in becoming a part of the transformation that is Alabama's Magic City these last three years.

Friday's event was the end to the first of five weeks of deep urban exploration for Birmingham's citizens - a gut check. They were asked to imagine what their city is becoming. Notice I didn't use the word "could." REVIVE has the biggest potential to inspire by allowing people to see it's already happening and it can be built upon.

Third Avenue North was taken over with custom benches, graphics filling window spaces, freshly made donuts, and t-shirts available for sale. Folks could even choose to catch a ride on a pedicab or write on a blackboard wall similar to the "Before I Die" project that's lived across from Regions Field for the last month.

As the crowds move through the city throughout the month, a question will begin to creep into participant's minds - "Well, what's next?" I'd argue that what's next is them. Some will have followed the tour to its next destination, but some will need to act on the urge to participate and move based on what they've seen. This time next year a return trip to the Theater District will most likely include a chance to see who moved into the Whitmire Lofts; continuing work on both the Lyric in addition to [the former Parisian/Booker T. Washington building at 3rd Ave. N. and 18th Street](#) as it's converted into residences with retail on the ground floor; and a buzz of activity in the form of construction at [the Pizitz building](#) and [the new transit hub](#).

This progress will be visible and tangible. Hopefully it will be a common occurrence throughout the city. Whether it does or not though depends on its citizens even more than it depends on REV.

Most of the folks I've seen so far while passing through would be considered the usual suspects - they believe in what's currently happening in the city and have no problem jumping on board with the latest proposal or project. You need these people, or else there's no one to inspire those who don't necessarily believe yet (think of it as a sort of "preaching to the choir" at church). That said,

Friday's was the first tangible step in convincing some still on the fence about the city's future outside of the city center. They were able to see how it played with what's already there - and how it could make it better. It allowed them to see the building blocks and provide a frame of reference in a heavily traveled section of the region - one that will see additional transformation and construction cranes in the next 12-18 months. They needed to see the choir excited and catch their infectious belief in the future of the city.



I'm looking forward to seeing how neighborhoods like East Lake (this week), Five Points South, Woodlawn, and Ensley respond when REVIVE stops there in the coming weeks - particularly in how they choose to engage with the businesses and the activities presented. The residents need to be active participants, sharing what they like (or don't like) with REV. They've got cards out seeking input and it's not like you can't reach out to them online or in person.

The city is at a tipping point - one where it can't just point to an organization or a big box that exists elsewhere but to itself (a.k.a. its citizens) for the needed energy and action to continue. It's not to say it's not possible for [an organization or event to spark a change](#), but it takes fuel to keep it going. I'm optimistic that the passion already on display will go a long way, but the furnace must continued to be stoked and more must jump hop on board. This is one time where waiting for someone else to make a move simply delays seeing our future.