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# **Grand jury recommends county sue over Great Park**

## **Report concludes Irvine betrayed public trust by seizing control of development.**

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The Orange County Register

The county Board of Supervisors is unlikely to sue the city of Irvine to gain some power over planning the Great Park, despite a grand jury recommendation that it consider exactly that.

And changing the Great Park's governing board so it includes more outsiders – another grand jury recommendation – is unnecessary, possibly negligent, and not likely to happen, its vice chairman said.

The grand jury Tuesday officially released a report titled, "The Orange County Great Park: Whose Park is It?" with the subtitle, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

It concluded the city of Irvine betrayed the public trust by seizing ultimate control over the Great Park, and that the county should consider suing to gain some control over its development.

A majority of supervisors said this week they don't want county money used for lawsuits to take back a park they never wanted.

"Irvine is taking on a huge responsibility and huge cost to manage this great park. And whoever manages or controls the park won't matter as much as that the park is open to the public," said Supervisor Chris Norby. "If the county were to insist to have a seat on the table, presumably we would have to bring along some funding. The last thing I want to do is spend more county money on a park in Irvine."

Supervisors Tom Wilson, Jim Silva and Bill Campbell also didn't see a need, or grounds, for a suit.

The Great Park is envisioned as the emerald heart of increasingly urban Orange County, meant to rival New York City's Central Park as a home to world-class museums and recreation.

In the campaign for Measure W – which voters approved in 2002, choosing a park over an airport for the old El Toro Marine base – it was portrayed as an oasis for the entire county. But the grand jury said the Irvine City Council has seized all control over the park's development, violating the spirit of Measure W.

That's just not correct, said Michael Pinto, Laguna Beach resident and vice chairman of the Great Park board.

When the city created the Great Park Corp. in 2003, it was clearly a city subsidiary, under the council's control, he said. He pointed it out at the time, "but I guess no one was listening," he said.

The grand jury wants Irvine to back off and make the park board more inclusive. That, Pinto said, is unlikely, and could be negligent.

Irvine owns the land the park will sit on. Irvine received millions from the developer. To relinquish control of those assets to a park board with a majority of outsiders would be tantamount to handing over an open checkbook.

"Why fix what's not broken? It's working spectacularly," Pinto said. "It's unheard of how fast we're moving forward. If we only designed the Great Park for Irvine, it would financially struggle from day one. ... A park of this magnitude is only sustainable if it's attractive to everyone. It'll be a park for everyone."

Councilwoman Christina Shea hopes that a resolution declaring Irvine's ultimate control is rescinded and that an independent Great Park board is empowered.

"That resolution violated our promises to the county and Irvine residents," Shea said. "We should adopt an independent board, which would be a firewall for the city of Irvine."

The council takes up the report Tuesday. The city and supervisors have 90 days to respond to the grand jury in writing.