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Great Park leaders back final design

'This is not your grandmother's park,' board member says.

By SEAN EMERY

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IRVINE – Great Park leaders today shifted their focus from the drawing table to the bulldozer, accepting the recently completed design for a more than \$1.4 billion transition from a stark military base to what is envisioned as the first great metropolitan park of the 21st century.

Architect Ken Smith presented his ambitious plans for the park, unveiling an award-winning comprehensive design that was three years, and millions of dollars, in the making.

Smith's hourlong electronic tour of the park showed most of the project's high profile features, from active sports fields, cultural meeting places, agricultural fields, natural landmarks, and protected ecological environments.

"This is not your grandmother's park. This park has been designed for a county that is rapidly evolving into a metropolis." said Walkie Ray, a Great Park board member. "No guts, no glory, and I think we are headed for glory on this project."

Great Park Chairman Larry Agran acknowledged that the design process has been both lengthy and costly, but said the work was necessary to make the project work.

"We make no apologies for investing these three years and nearly \$50 million to get to where we are today," Agran said. "There is no way to build a major metropolitan park that is nearly twice the size of New York's Central Park, without investing in a world class design."

While board members universally praised Smith's design, several noted that they still must find ways to fund the work.

"We can talk all day about how beautiful the park plan is. The bottom line is how are we going to build it?" said Irvine Mayor Sukhee Kang, who also serves on the park board. "It's time to roll up our sleeves and get that money."

Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido, who also serves on the park board, suggested going after federal economic stimulus money for the Great Park, noting that the completion of the design plans means the project is now shovel ready. Pulido said he is scheduled to meet with White House officials tomorrow about their stimulus plans.

"It's like a tsunami," Pulido said of the federal funds. "It's going to come and it's going to go."

The Great Park board recessed just before 1 p.m., planning to return later this afternoon to discuss the first wave of park construction.

More information to come.

Contact the writer: 949-553-2911 or semery@ocregister.com