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## Great Park may start small and build

### Some directors suggest focusing on expanding the balloon attraction rather than preparing the entire 1,347-acre site.

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IRVINE Some Great Park officials are thinking of producing a small section of the park now rather than focusing on preparing the whole 1,347-acre site right away.

One of their first ideas discussed last week at a Great Park board meeting is to expand the balloon attraction.

A strategy to develop the park in small sections stems from worries about funding for the park – of \$200 million in developer fees paid by the Lennar Corp. and some small revenues from leasing out land – the Great Park Corp. is on track to finish the 2007-08 fiscal year with \$66.3 million in the bank for park construction. The most recent park construction estimate is \$1.1 billion.

And that leaves some Great Park Board directors looking to first expand the orange helium balloon attraction by adding night flights, activities and food.

"Perhaps we should finish some smaller projects, rather than in one big mouthful," said board member Bill Kogerman

Board member Walkie Ray suggested rethinking the board's earlier decision to grade the entire park first – at a cost of about \$8 million. Ray said that the balloon attraction needs to be expanded so that attendance stays high.

"I don't think this level of attendance will continue without our proactive involvement... we're still in the honeymoon phase," Ray said.

Board member Steven Choi echoed worries about expenses, and he suggested the board come up with ways to make enough money from the balloon to offset its costs.

Master park designer Ken Smith said Thursday that his team is working on ideas for expanding the balloon attraction to be presented for a board decision in November.

Ideas discussed by the design team include adding more signs so people can find their way from the freeway to the balloon; more trees and grassy areas; more parking that is closer to the balloon; a larger visitor's tent; a place to buy food and water, such as a health-conscious café, and more lighting.

Also in November, Great Park staff will return with a proposal for making money with the balloon. The balloon and visitor's center cost the Great Park Corp. about \$1.6 million annually.

Some facts about the orange balloon so far:

- More than 25,000 passengers have gone up on the balloon.
- 61.3 percent of the passengers live within 10 miles of the attraction.
- The balloon launched on July 14, but construction continued past the Aug. 10 deadline. Most construction was finished Oct. 19, but some of the contract funding is being withheld until the company – Cal-Pac Engineering Co. – finishes fixing all the small details as requested by Great Park staff and designers.

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