

Great Park official says it's best to go slow

TERI SFORZA/STAFF WRITER

Six years is not a long time when the park is expected to take 50 years to complete, experts said. But Great Park officials have probably erred by failing to deliver something more useful, more quickly.

"The Greensward plan for Central Park was approved on April 28, 1858, and by that next winter, people were ice skating on the lake," said Doug Blonsky of New York's Central Park Conservancy.

"I don't think the Great Park is necessarily behind right now, but you do want to get something in the ground growing as soon as you can."

Urban park expert Peter Harnick agrees. "If you have \$200 million, the goal would be to spend it as quickly as possible creating something really terrific so people can come in and say, 'Wow! This is really going to be great!' " said Harnick, director of the Center for City Park Excellence at the Trust for Public Land in Washington, D.C. "Get it open to the public."

Patience, park proponents say, will pay off in the end.

"Everyone always wants to go faster," said developer Michael Ray, Conservancy chairman. "The slowdown in the housing market means that the tax increment financing required to build the park has slowed down. It gives the design team more time to make perfect drawings. I think it's best during design to go slow, be sure of yourself, of how everything connects together. It's good that people can be a little more contemplative."

Conservancy officials recently went to Washington, D.C. to meet with National Archives officials about the possibility of building a learning center on the park's "Cultural Terrace." The National Archives would provide funding for the building – \$50 million to \$80 million – and a private partner would put up the money for the exhibit itself. "That would go over great if things work out as we hope they will," Ray said.

The conservancy is also working to persuade other nonprofits to embrace park projects.

Ray gets juiced every time he visits New York. "My favorite thing isn't the museums, it's the park, walking through it, jogging through it, seeing all the stuff that's going on, all the people, it's just incredible," Ray said. "If your great-great-great grandparents were part of the creation of Central Park, you would know about that. It's a legacy. This thing is going to be around for a thousand years." **DID YOU KNOW?** A small piece of the 1,300-acre park is taking shape. A 27-acre "preview park" is slated to rise around the big orange balloon over the next two years, with the first events kicking off in July. The Conservancy hopes to start work on a "preview garden" for the larger botanical garden in the next year.

