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Great Parking Lot plan gains support

Plan to temporarily lease Great Park land to auto companies for storage still needs city council approval.

By SEAN EMERY
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE – Great Park leaders today gave the green light to auto companies looking to ease the pressure of overflowing inventory by temporarily storing unsold cars on unused park land.

Park staff hopes to raise more than \$250,000 in return for storing the autos, which Park Chairman Larry Agran referred to as a "small silver lining" in an otherwise bleak nationwide economic outlook.

Experts say auto manufacturers are racing to scale back production in the face of plummeting demand, but they are still stuck with a surplus of cars ordered and built before the recent economic collapse. Now, with space running out at the ports, auto companies are looking for alternate storage locations.

City leaders say the Great Park, with its abundance of empty runways left over from the old El Toro airbase, is a natural fit for temporary vehicle storage. At least three auto companies have approached the Great Park, staff said, hoping to lease up to 100 acres of land.

Great Park Operations Manager Rod Cooper suggested starting out by leasing out 20 acres of land. Cooper estimated that auto companies are able to store about 150 vehicles per acre, although the number of cars at the park would likely fluctuate day to day.

The city would keep its options open by starting with a 90-day lease, Cooper said, but they could easily extend that time frame.

"It depends on what the economy does," Cooper said. "We are being told they would need the space for a considerable amount of time, either six months or a year."

The auto companies would be responsible for watching over the vehicles, Cooper said, and for constructing security fences. He claimed the transport of vehicles on and off the park land wouldn't present a huge traffic impact, pointing out that other Great Park tenants, such as the Second Harvest Food Bank, already use large trucks on the property.

Cooper said that staff plans to quickly move forward with creating agreements with the auto companies, but the plan still needs the approval of the City Council, which doesn't meet until Jan. 13. All five council members also sit on the Great Park Board of Directors, and the four present at today's meeting all voted in favor of the plan.

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