

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Great Park plans approved

After OK by Irvine's Community Services Commission, the park master plan will go before Planning Commission in late July.



The Great Park vision sketched by Ken Smith's design team.

RENDERING COURTESY GREAT PARK DESIGN STUDIO

By SONYA SMITH
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE – Ken Smith's "great" vision received its first approval Wednesday night.

The Irvine Community Services Commission unanimously approved Smith's Great Park master plan. The plans will now go to Irvine's Planning Commission for final approval in late July.

"This indeed is a masterpiece," said Chair Jeannie Luong.

Discussion took about a half-hour and commissioners asked only a few questions – most which cannot be answered until designers get further along in park planning.

Commissioners did make some recommendations, though, that include: building a multicultural facility as soon as possible, including sports areas for not just children and teenagers but also pre-teens, consider building an indoor performing arts venue in the park, connect trails in the Great Park to the Lennar Corp.'s surrounding development, sprinkle more parking lots throughout the park, make sure the park includes sufficient sports facilities and include bicycle racks on the shuttle buses.

Ken Smith's design team was picked in January 2006 to design the park after the Great Park Board held an international design competition. His group presented a draft master plan Oct. 12. After several months of review by city staff, the plans are coming up for commission approval. Next, Smith's group will work on all of the park's details.

Smith's design includes:

CANYON• Paths and trails will run through a canyon, which will stretch 2-1/2 miles, with the width varying from 300 to 600 feet. Engineer Pat Fuscoe will create a canyon by digging down 30 feet and using that earth to build up berms on either side to make it look 60 feet deep. The canyon would also have gently sloped pathways to allow its use by visitors of all abilities. Park ecologist Steven Handel wants to plant cottonwoods and sycamores along the streams, oaks

and walnuts above the canyons, and perhaps some palms throughout the two-mile-long canyon. Most plantings would be drought-tolerant to match Southern California's dry climate.

BOTANICAL GARDENS• A 68-foot bridge, set into one side of the canyon, will serve as a building and a bridge from the cultural terrace to the botanical gardens. The gardens will house collections of California-native and Mediterranean plants.

CULTURAL TERRACE• Museums and a library may be built into hillside berms, which will be made from materials excavated and recycled from the old air base at the site. The amphitheater, comparable to the Hollywood Bowl, will face a 21-acre recreational man-made lake.

ORANGE BALLOON• A 72-foot-wide orange helium balloon tethered to the ground will take 25-30 passengers at a time 500 feet up in the air.

GEOLOGICAL TIMELINE• A timeline along a pathway will inform park visitors about their connection to the land. The pathway will begin near the lake, with the timeline marking events in geological time, ending at the present day near the sports fields.

SPORTS PARK• The sports park brings together a skate park, water sports park, baseball and softball diamonds, soccer fields and an indoor soccer complex. Nearby will be a flower statue of El Toro's mascot, a bull named Parterre, as well as the Orange Balloon, which will allow visitors views of the countryside from the air.

HISTORY• Concrete and other materials taken from demolished runways, building pads and structures will be used throughout the park. Though their use hasn't been decided, about 19 of the 585 acres of old runways and taxiways will be kept intact. Some runway chunks may guide a waterfall in the canyon; redwood beams salvaged from the hangars may be used in bridges over the canyon. A hangar built in 1944, once used by the Orange County Fire Authority, will be converted into a military museum. A separate veterans' memorial will be installed in the park's center.

STREAMS• Streams that have long been buried under runways and buildings, such as Agua Chinon, will be uncovered.

SOLAR STERLINGS• Solar sterlings, first suggested by students in the spring UC Irvine Great Park class will be installed in the park. The mirrored dishes use heat from the sun to make electricity; each dish can power eight to 20 homes.

WILDLIFE CORRIDOR• A corridor about 2-1/2 miles long and 330 feet wide in some parts will allow animals to pass from the ocean to the mountains. The corridor will be dense with plants and trees to help mask light and sound. A portion of Borrego Canyon Wash will flow through this.

TRAILS• Trails for bicyclists, joggers and walkers will wind through the Lennar development and the Great Park – blurring the park's boundaries.

TRABUCO ENTRY• The Trabuco Entry, the monumental gateway into the park, will feature a 60 x 300 foot gate that will lead visitors through a series of fountains and a reflecting pool.

monorail, trolleys or buses will move visitors between pa