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From the Los Angeles Times

Irvine Is Criticized on Park Takeover

By Jean O. Pasco
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Orange County supervisors Tuesday called on the Irvine City Council to rescind its recent takeover of the Orange County Great Park, saying the move was a betrayal of county voters who turned down a proposed airport at the site.

A split Irvine council last week voted to make the Orange County Great Park Corp. an advisory body reporting to the council. The city created the corporation in 2003 to build and operate a 1,300-acre park at the former El Toro Marine base.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Campbell said the "power grab" broke the city's promise that the regional board would design and operate the park. County voters in 2002 killed the county's plan for an international airport at El Toro, approving park zoning instead.

"The city has stripped the operating body of its ability to act independently," said Campbell, who drew his colleagues' unanimous support for a resolution admonishing Irvine. "This is inconsistent with what was promised to the citizens of Orange County and to this board when we voted to allow Irvine to annex the base."

Irvine council members and supervisors have squabbled for years over the vision of the park and who should control it.

The supervisors' protest Tuesday was merely symbolic. The county gave up authority over the land when supervisors allowed the city to annex the El Toro property in 2003.

Last year, the base was sold by the Navy to Lennar Corp., which deeded the parkland to the city. Lennar plans to build homes and businesses on 2,400 acres. An additional 1,000 acres will stay in federal hands for wildlife habitat.

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Irvine Mayor Beth Krom told supervisors that the city always was legally responsible for decisions about land use, zoning and budgets for the park, although she conceded that that control was "somewhat invisible."

She denied that the city had changed the board's governing structure — an assertion challenged last week by two Irvine council members who voted against Krom's measure to take over management of the land.

"The residents of Irvine and the people of Orange County know that the Great Park is in good hands," Krom said.

Campbell referred to the corporation's bylaws, quoting provisions that gave the panel final say over millions of dollars in development and construction contracts that now will be handed out by the City Council. The corporation also was to have its own employees.

"This is a substantial change that's inconsistent with the bylaws," Campbell said.

Supervisor Chris Norby said the airport plan was killed "with the certain promise that the Great Park would be administered by a collective body and not just a particular city."

Three residents backed up supervisors at their meeting, calling the city's plan a ruse to lull voters countywide into believing they would have a say in the park.

"This belongs to the entire county of Orange, [and] we were told we'd have some input," said Westminster resident Darrell Nolta.

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