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Lennar hopes to cool the park

Company presenting its street plans tonight to the Planning Commission

By SONYA SMITH
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

The Lennar Corp. is attempting to cool the Great Park with a proposal tonight for the park and surrounding development's roads, sewers and utilities.

Lennar officials hope to cool the temperature with "green streets" engineered to conserve water, slow traffic and create less heat than normal streets.

But officials also want to put a chill on the Irvine Co.'s concerns that potential traffic was not sufficiently studied by the Lennar Corp.

In January, the Lennar Corp. planned to present the first maps for the Great Park's public and private development to the Planning Commission. Lennar is charged with submitting those plans, and the commission is tasked with reviewing those maps that include roads, utilities and sewer plans for the park and surrounding development.

At a study session before the actual commission review, Irvine Co. officials demanded that Lennar thoroughly study possible traffic impacts before the map is approved by the commission. The officials said that without proper traffic studies, the development could gridlock streets in north Irvine and Lake Forest.

Bob Santos, division president of Lennar's development surrounding the Great Park, said at the time he was dismayed that the Irvine Co. felt the needed to raise the issue with the commission. He said initial traffic studies had been completed and that his firm planned to begin comprehensive traffic studies this year.

Rather than bring the issue, with the dispute over traffic studies, before the commission in January, Lennar chose to meet with Irvine Co. officials and city staff.

Talks have persisted in the four months since, and Lennar is bringing the maps to the commission tonight with a few revisions aimed at appeasing the Irvine Co. and Planning Commission.

Lennar hired Austin Foust and Associates to study expected traffic. That report, which was reviewed by city staff, concludes that some of the minor street plan changes for the park have not changed the expected traffic (about 148,000 daily trips).

Lennar officials and the staff also added conditions that the firm must thoroughly study traffic conditions before submitting development plans. The studies would then further evaluate traffic

based on more detailed development plans.

But planning commissioners will also consider tonight whether the Great Park roads can differ from normal city roads. Lennar is asking to deviate from city road requirements for several reasons, including routing around existing buildings, building narrower roads that will slow traffic and reduce heat, and allowing for landscaped medians on some roads.

The commission's approval tonight would be the first step in accepting small changes for the roads; changes aimed at making the streets more environmentally friendly.

Other road ideas: sidewalks and roads will be made with recycled concrete from the base; roads will be narrower to reduce the amount of pavement used and to slow traffic; and rather than curbs, ditches planted with grasses and willows will catch water run-off and filter out pollutants.

TIMELINE

March 5, 2002: Voters pass Measure W, 58 percent to 42 percent, eliminating planned airport uses at El Toro.

Feb. 16, 2005: Navy's auction of El Toro ends with Miami-based Lennar Corp. buying the base for \$649.5 million.

Oct. 12, 2006: Ken Smith's design team releases the park's draft master plan.

Jan. 11, 2007: Irvine Co. demands that potential traffic be thoroughly studied before roads are built for the Great Park project.

March 1, 2007: Ken Smith's design team releases a park cost estimate: \$1.1 billion.

Today: Irvine Planning Commission will review the road, utility and sewer plans for the Great Park and surrounding Lennar Corp. development. The commission meets at 5:30 p.m. in City Hall.

June: Community Services and Planning commissions will review park master plan; Great Park Board begins setting a phasing plan; City Council considers plans for building a mass transit system at the Great Park.

July 14: Orange passenger balloon to launch.

Mid-Late 2007: Environmental impact report due on proposal to give the city 402 more acres in exchange for allowing the Lennar Corp. to build about 9,500 residences around the Great Park (up from 3,625).

Mid-2008: Lennar plans to have the first homes open and for sale.

2009: First phase of the Great Park expected to open.

2011: All sections of runway, taxiways, roads and building pads to be recycled are ground up.

2012:All concrete and asphalt at the of base ground up and recycled.

SOURCES: City of Irvine, the Lennar Corp. and Orange County Register reports.

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Page 2 of 2



FILE PHOTO: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

MATERIAL RECYCLED from the runways at the old El Toro base will be used in construction of roadways and sidewalks for Great Park development. Lennar Corp. will present its plans for roads as well as electrical, sewer and water lines for approval at tonight's Planning Commission meeting.