

Los Angeles Downtown News
11/10/03

Gaining Ground

Taylor Yard Plans Near Completion, Earn Community Praise

By Jason Mandell

While community members are at odds over how to develop a park at the Cornfield site near Chinatown, plans for another park just a few minutes north are being called a cause for celebration. The consensus over the designs marks a major step toward building what many hope will be a first class park along the Los Angeles River.

State and city officials last Wednesday presented designs for a revitalized Taylor Yard to about 200 residents of Cypress Park and other stakeholders. Plans for the 40-acre plot between San Fernando Road and the rail line call for a multitude of sports fields and courts, hiking and biking trails, a picnic area, community center and other features. The proposal, which is nearly complete, was embraced by the community.

"I am so thrilled that this terribly underserved community is going to get such a cutting-edge facility," said Melanie Winter, director of The River Project who helped lead the longstanding effort to convert the rail yard into a park.

Officials presented three highly detailed design alternatives for the park, which will be run jointly by the city and state. The designs differ in where they place amenities such as soccer fields and tennis courts. Community members made some recommendations to the plans, which officials will use to create a final design; that will be presented Nov. 18.

"It will be sort of a celebration," said Sean Woods, a planner for the State Parks department who has been working on the Taylor Yard project.

Consensus on the plan was not reached overnight. Woods said that early on in the planning process, community members distrusted officials charged with developing the park. "The tone was contentious," recalled Woods.

Soon the community became entangled in a debate over whether the park should be used primarily for sports or passive recreation. In recent months, residents focused on the specific layout of the property, eventually arriving at a plan that incorporates an array of features on the site.

"We wanted to show that 40 acres can fit a whole lot," said Winter.

A Park of Many Phases

Once the final design is unveiled next Tuesday, state officials will begin work on the park. Woods said the state has enough money to develop a portion of the park, which could open by late spring or early summer. A temporary park at the nearby Cornfield is set to open around the same time, which would add an abundance of new green space to a park-poor area.

However, Woods said it will cost between \$5 million and \$7 million to develop the majority of Taylor Yard; that money has not been secured. Since the city is leasing half the land from the state, both are pursuing further funding.

Councilman Ed Reyes, who has been pushing for the development of parks along the L.A. River, said the city will go after grants. "We're hoping in the next three to six months to see some results," said Reyes, whose First District includes Taylor Yard.

Woods said the park will be developed in phases as new funding becomes available.