

Angels Gate Park's future is mapped
By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer
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Wrapping up months of work, a citizens panel has put its stamp of approval on a master plan for one of San Pedro's most spectacular ocean-view parks.

Included in the proposal for Angels Gate Park are areas for an American Indian friendship circle and arbor, sports fields, a new gift shop for the Fort MacArthur Museum and a permanent off-leash dog park.

The Angels Gate Cultural Center, one of the park's primary tenants, would get a restaurant and a theater.

The plan, however, is conceptual only, and could take years to implement.

It leaves out some details regarding parking and other infrastructure to be worked out by engineers and park planners later.

And there's no guarantee that all of the elements will remain in the plan once it finally is approved.

It still faces lengthy state and city reviews.

Funding also could delay some of the major components, such as a costly renovation of the World War II-era swimming pool on the former military grounds. In addition, city parks officials have been resistant to ideas such as a dog park.

"There's still a lot of work that needs to be done," said Juliann Wolfgram, chairwoman of the Angels Gate Planning Committee. "We need to raise the funds to get the technical work done. The (California Environmental Quality Act study) will cost \$250,000. Where's that money coming from?"

"But this is something the community has wanted for decades," she said of the plan.

"I think we have the momentum (to get it done) and we're trusting that the council office will make sure that momentum continues." In the end, the committee brushed off objections from city parks officials over some of the proposed elements - the dog park, for example - to approve the plan.

"The community has a right to have it the way they want it," said plan consultant Laura Loring of Alchemy Design and Architecture in Long Beach. "The community was heard."

Existing park tenants, including two model railroad clubs that rent space, will remain under the plan. No new buildings will be constructed and there will be a strong emphasis on restoring the area's natural habitat and connecting the sites with walking trails.

New uses include 1.6 acres of ball fields.

Meanwhile, it remains unclear whether the 64-acre park at Gaffey Street and Paseo del Mar will be declared a historic landmark as requested by the Fort MacArthur Museum. State officials are set to take up the matter in the next couple of months. If approved, the move could complicate implementation of the plan.

Some museum advocates, along with city parks leaders, have been especially resistant to including a fenced-in, off-leash dog park as part of the mix.

The dog park proposal, Loring said, was sketched into the Joan Milke Flores section of the park in response to requests by the committee and members of the public. There is now a temporary dog park on port-owned property in San Pedro, but that agreement is set to expire in three years.

"If Recreation and Parks has objections they should say, 'Here's what our objection is' and the dog park people should be prepared to come back and say, 'Here's how we're going to fix that,'" Loring said.

"Hopefully it will be kept on there long enough for that kind of dialogue to happen."

To move forward with the concept plan without getting bogged down in too many technical details, the committee on Wednesday night passed a motion that asks the consultant and city to work on parking and other infrastructure options separately.

The map approved by the committee will be unveiled sometime within the next month during a public forum to be held at Angels Gate Cultural Center. The date and time will be announced later.

Los Angeles Councilwoman Janice Hahn has said she'll appoint a committee to make sure the plan moves forward. She envisions Angels Gate Park as San Pedro's "cultural center."

"The community's conceptual plan includes some great suggestions for Angels Gate and I will work to find funding and make it a reality," she said in a written statement.

"Committee members do not want this to die, to just sit on somebody's desk," Wolfgram said. "We need to continue working toward finalization. There's still a lot of work that needs to be done."