

Angels Gate Center director seeks to develop master plan

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Author:Paul Clinton MORE SAN PEDRO

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Nathan Birnbaum wants to finish a job started almost 30 years ago.

The executive director of the Angels Gate Cultural Center is following through on the decades-old promise to the federal government -- one that allowed the city of Los Angeles to acquire the land -- to develop a master plan for expansion of the center.

Birnbaum helped the center successfully lobby its Department of Recreation and Parks bosses in January 2005 for a 30-year ground lease for the center, housed in ramshackle former Army barracks since the early 1980s.

In mid-July, Birnbaum formally requested proposals from planning firms to develop a road map for expanding a center that sits on a portion of the 64-acre site. The companies have until Sept. 1 to submit proposals.

"The planners will be asked to create a master plan for the entire park, which never has been officially finished since the 1970s when the land was given to the city," Birnbaum said. "The cultural center is helping to resolve a 30-year-old planning process."

To fund the planning, Birnbaum is using grant funds from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment in Sacramento and the Harbor-Watts Economic Development Corp.

Frank O'Brien, the corporation's director, has promised to work toward nailing down funding, Birnbaum said.

For much of the 20th century, the land at Angels Gate was used by the Army as part of Fort MacArthur. After the Army decommissioned the base in 1975, the federal government set out to dispose of it. In September 1978, the federal government deeded the property to the city of Los Angeles to be used for "cultural purposes," the deed states.

The city also agreed to develop a master plan for the site. An initial outline was submitted to the federal government, but never approved by any city panel, Birnbaum said.

An approved plan will net funds for park development.

"We are absolutely committed to finishing this, to getting a final master plan that gets an approval because a completed plan for the park will trigger the release of \$2 million in implementation funds that are earmarked for Angels Gate Park," he said.

The city initiative Proposition K, a parks bond passed in 1996, includes a line item that unlocks the \$2 million, after a master plan has been approved, Birnbaum said.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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