

Planning for Angels Gate speeds along

SAN PEDRO: Los Angeles officials seem to have already eliminated some possible park uses. A citizens panel is reviewing about 20 proposals.

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)
November 12, 2007
Author: Donna Littlejohn
Staff Writer

Approaching a milestone in the creation of a master plan for Angels Gate Park, it appears city officials already have made some preliminary decisions about what will work - and what won't. An 18-member citizens panel is considering some 20 proposals from various groups hoping to use a piece of the 64-acre, ocean-view park in San Pedro, with tabulations due to be unveiled by Nov. 20.

But Los Angeles city parks officials ultimately have the final say on what will be developed at the park and they've been circulating maps that indicate some proposals may be simply out of luck. The maps will be posted Wednesday in Building A of Angels Gate Cultural Center, 3601 S. Gaffey St.

A proposal for a fenced-in, off-leash dog park, for example, appears to have already been eliminated.

"Recreation and Parks has basically said their management does not want (a dog park) at that park," said master plan consultant Laura Loring of Alchemy Design and Architecture.

City officials reportedly are looking in other areas of the 15th City Council District, including Harbor City and Harbor Gateway, for an alternative space. The community's current dog park has temporary space only for three years on port property.

Meanwhile, a request for 9 acres for youth sports fields also could face challenges, with city officials saying there is not enough flat land at the park to accommodate the fields. Supporters say sports fields were promised at Angels Gate during another master plan process that never was completed in the 1980s.

There are discussions under way, however, to see if some fields could be developed on existing school district property within Angels Gate Park under a shared-use agreement between the community and schools.

"Our goal is to accommodate everyone, but there are not 9 acres of flat field space in that park, so that's the best we can come up with," Loring said.

"There are probably things that people want that just aren't going to fit," Loring said. "It's a fine line to accommodate everyone."

American Indian interests will probably be included in some way, but at least one committee member has raised concerns about whether such uses will be sufficiently available to the general public. There also are talks about trying to move one of the American Indian proposals to nearby Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City.

Other proposals that call for major construction that would obscure views and open vistas at Angels Gate also could face likely rejection.

A Korean-American group is hoping to build on its physical presence next to the Korean Friendship Bell at the southern hilltop vista in the park.

Tensions also continue over a campaign by volunteers at the Fort MacArthur Museum to have the entire park declared as a state historic district in honor of its military past.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn has written a letter to state officials asking that they hold off on any decision about a historic overlay, which she said would complicate and add to the cost of developing the park.

"I think it's kind of premature," Hahn said. "We're trying to get everybody to the table to have a consensus."

The Angels Gate Master Plan Steering Committee will make draft recommendations on which of the proposals should be included in a final plan.

But in the end, it will be the city's Recreation and Parks Commission that has the final say on what will or will not be done on the property.

The committee will gather at 10 a.m. Dec. 1 at Angels Gate for a public session to discuss its draft recommendations.

In the meantime, members are being asked to rank each of the proposals using a complex matrix that takes into account such criteria as historical and aesthetic value.

"There are all sorts of suggestions, many of which can probably be incorporated and some of which probably can't," said committee member Andrew Silber.

Another member, Joe Janesic, believes the process is moving too fast. "A master plan like this should take about two years and we're trying to condense it into six months," he said. "I think it's the wrong thing to do for the park, and it's the wrong thing to do for the community. It's not giving people time to essentially air their ideas and come to a true consensus."

But master plan organizers say it's important to stick to the timeline to make sure it gets done this time.

Hahn believes there already is a general consensus in terms of an over-arching vision for the park that overlooks the ocean. "There's been a lot of hard work put into this and, as we know, there are a lot of special interests that want a piece of Angels Gate Park," Hahn said.

Nearly everyone agrees that the park, with its spectacular location along Paseo del Mar overlooking the ocean, has stellar possibilities to blossom into a high-profile regional center for the arts, culture and education, with recreational and open space uses included in the mix.

"The potential is really not understood by anyone," Silber said. "It's quite fantastic."

Sophia Pena-Cortez, who heads up the Pacific Region of the Recreation and Parks Department, said funding will be an issue, however.

"A master plan doesn't mean it's going to happen," she said. "We need resources to make it happen."

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L.A. council rejects idea for SP park

ANGELS GATE: A group wants the state to declare the former military site historic.

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)

October 31, 2007

Author: Donna Littlejohn

Staff Writer

A recommendation by a city commission to declare all of San Pedro's Angels Gate Park a historic district was overruled Tuesday by the Los Angeles City Council.

But proponents intend to press their case to the state of California, which makes the final decision.

Joe Janesic, vice president of the Fort MacArthur Military Association, said the council's action will have little effect on the association's case when it goes before state preservation authorities.

Essentially, the city's position now will be neutral rather than supportive.

"Their input isn't of no significance. We would certainly (have) liked to have had it, but it's not required by the state," Janesic said.

Granting historic status to the entire park could complicate ongoing efforts to finalize a master plan for the facility, according to those who oppose a historic-status overlay.

"At minimum, it would complicate things, and at maximum it could halt it," said Nathan Birnbaum, executive director of the Angels Gate Cultural Center. "We've got to find some other road. That road is not very good for anybody."

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, in putting forth the motion to veto the commission recommendation, said more needs to be done to notify the community about its actions.

"I think everyone realized (the military museum association) was putting in their application, but then the Cultural Affairs Commission agendized it and didn't notify anybody," Hahn said.

Local military historians last summer declared their intentions to nominate the 64-acre oceanfront park at 3601 S. Gaffey St. for state historic status, citing the property's nearly 100-year background as a military site.

After learning that the city's Cultural Affairs Commission voted in favor of the nomination without notifying the community, the City Council voted 12-0 to veto the action.

"It's a big victory for the neighborhood council," said Doug Epperhart, president of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council.

Epperhart, a member of the Angels Gate Master Plan Steering Committee, said word of the Oct. 18 Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Commission vote didn't filter down to the community until well after the fact, on Oct. 24.

Janesic said his group, which is the volunteer arm of the city-run military museum within the park, didn't learn that the matter was to go before the Cultural Affairs Commission until the day before the vote.

The Fort MacArthur Museum Association wants to preserve 15 wood-framed buildings constructed in 1940 to house young soldiers in the event the nation entered World War II.

"To me this is about accountability," Janesic said of the effort to preserve the historic military structures remaining on the property. "You can't protect something based on somebody's word."

The 100-page nomination document will be submitted to the state by Thursday, Janesic said. Birnbaum wants the association to hold off until later next month, after the master plan process winds up.

"We want these processes to be brought together, so that the preservation aspect of the plan would be jointly agreed upon," Birnbaum said.

Angels Gate Park occupies federal land that was deeded to the city of Los Angeles in 1977 to be used for recreation.

But for years, the city had no money to develop a master plan. After the Angels Gate Cultural Center, which operates artist studios and galleries inside many of the old military buildings, was given a 30-year lease, private funding became available to come up with the plan.

A historic designation could make it difficult to make significant changes or replace any of those aging structures.

Hahn said she supports granting historic-site status to the military museum property within the park, but not to the entire park around it.

"For the first time in history we have all these stakeholders forming a consensus of a master plan for how we want to see Angels Gate Park look in the future," she said. "I think an overlay would be problematic. It would increase the cost of the master plan and make it very burdensome to try to implement a master plan."

Several master plan public meetings have been held, and draft recommendations are slated to be released by mid-November.

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WANT

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)

September 28, 2007

WHAT: "How Would You Use Angels Gate Park?" - the third and last master plan public forum

WHEN: 10 a.m. to noon Saturday

WHERE: Building H, Angels Gate Cultural Center, 3601 S. Gaffey St., San Pedro

INFORMATION: www.angelsgateart.org (Click on "master planning")

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What's in store for Angels Gate? Dog park, pool, restaurant or...

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)

September 7, 2007

Author: Donna Littlejohn

STAFF WRITER

Ideas on how to make better use of Angels Gate Park are rapidly multiplying, ranging from the simple to the grandiose, from the ethereal to the earthly. The second of three public forums is set for Saturday, when another seven proposals will be outlined in 10-minute presentations by various advocates.

The new proposals will join seven others collected after last month's initial meeting to entertain ideas of how best to use the 64-acre hillside park overlooking the ocean at Gaffey Street and Paseo del Mar.

Last time, presentations featured proponents of youth sports fields, a campaign to highlight the land's military history and Korean-American-themed cultural attractions that would be added to the Korean Friendship Bell space.

Saturday's presentations from private groups and individuals will include those for an off-leash dog park, horseshoe pits, shuffleboard courts, an outdoor public swimming pool and various projects showcasing American Indian and Asian cultures.

A third and final meeting for presentations is planned for Sept. 29.

It's all part of an ongoing effort to establish a formal master plan for the Los Angeles city park that is already home to the high-profile Korean Friendship Bell, the Angels Gate Cultural Center with artist studios and galleries, a military museum and a youth hostel.

Recommendations from a committee overseeing the effort are expected to be ready by the end of this year. A consultant, Laura Loring, owner of Alchemy Design and Architecture in Long Beach, is project manager.

"I think they're making good progress," committee member June Burlingame Smith said of the process that began earlier this year. "I have hopes we're going to come up with some good solutions and a consensus on the use of the land."

Among the goals is to make sure one of San Pedro's most prominent open view parks is fully appreciated - and better used.

Making presentations Saturday in the following order are:

Kimberley Foley of Peninsula Dog Parks believes the time is right to establish a fenced-in, off-leash dog park on part of Angels Gate Park. San Pedro's existing 6-year-old dog park at Knoll Hill faces the loss of its temporary space on port property and a permanent site on city land is needed for the facility to continue operating.

Proponents point out that some residents have used the lower west portion of Angels Gate Park as an underground dog park anyway for more than a decade.

Bob Armstrong of the Angels Gate Hi-Rail Model Railroad Club, an existing, long-term tenant already of the park, will talk about the educational, cultural and historical aspects of the group that celebrates America's railroad history.

The club has made recent improvements to its current building that he will outline Saturday. Members also hold periodic open houses as part of their community outreach program.

Eric Lokke of San Pedro will propose a public middle school or high school for the property that would serve as a specialized institute for education in ecology, art, music and history.

"The school system in general is systematically cutting all the music and arts and environmental studies programs," he said.

Bruce Horton of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council wants to see more general recreational uses available at the park, including a new outdoor swimming pool (in conjunction with any public school that might be built on school district property within the park), horseshoe pits, a shuffleboard court, lawn bowling area and a skateboard park.

"I'd like to see activities that serve the area," said Horton, adding that benches and adequate parking are also a must for the park.

Aggie Slator, a San Pedro Realtor, wants to establish a "Palace of the Seven Gardens." Along with a restaurant offering diverse cuisines, the project would include gardens featuring plants and replica monuments that reflect cultures found in China, Japan, India, Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Asian music and dance programs would be included.

"When I (first) looked at the Friendship Bell I thought what a wonderful thing if we had different kinds of cultures there that people could really enjoy," Slator said.

Cindi Alvitre, co-director and founder of the Ti'at Society, is proposing a Tongva Ti'atem Boat House, an American Indian cultural and environmental education center that would offer paddle-making workshops, a place to watch the building of plank canoes, basket-making classes and various environmental offerings in urban and ocean sustainability along with cultural exchange programs.

Nathan Birnbaum of the Angels Gate Cultural Center will stress providing a park space where small nonprofits can thrive as part of the natural setting.

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Meeting today seeks ideas for Angels Gate Park MASTER PLAN: The manager of the San Pedro project envisions open space that "embodies nature, art, education."

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)

August 11, 2007

Author: Donna Littlejohn

STAFF WRITER

Seven organizations have lined up to make a pitch today for a piece of Angels Gate Park in San Pedro.

And that's just the start.

Leaders of an effort to create a new master plan for the 64-acre park overlooking the ocean at Gaffey Street and Paseo del Mar expect more groups and individuals to come forward as they attempt to get a better idea of what the public wants for general park uses.

The first seven groups to sign up will each give 10-minute presentations from 1 to 3 p.m. today. They include those representing military history, youth sports and Korean-American heritage interests.

A second meeting is tentatively planned for 10 a.m. to noon Sept. 8. At that meeting, organizers expect to hear from San Pedro dog park supporters who are in need of a permanent site and American Indians who see the property as spiritually significant to their heritage.

"We want to hear what people want," said Juliann Wolfgram of San Pedro, an art historian who is coordinating the master plan steering committee process. "This is an opportunity for anybody who has ideas on how they want to use the park to voice their ideas. Ideally, we'd like to have at least one if not two more of these public meetings."

In addition to organized groups, Wolfgram said the master plan steering committee wants to hear from independent park users.

"This is really for anybody," she said. "Someone may want to just say they want 10 picnic tables" in a particular area.

Presentation times must be reserved in advance and today's session is already booked, she said.

Project Manager Laura Loring, a former Angels Gate Cultural Center board member and owner of Alchemy Design and Architecture in Long Beach, said the overall vision is to form a public consensus on how to preserve and create an open space that "embodies nature, art, education and provides for beautiful opportunities for the whole community."

"Basically we are going to enhance the park's beauty," she said, addressing some community concerns that a lot of new buildings might be springing up on the hillside.

Because the park is zoned as open space, she said there will be a stress on preserving the land's natural beauty and views.

"This is for the children and it's for all of the community," she said, adding that the approach will be a cautious one.

"We're looking at new fencing, new irrigation, improving the roads, makin it all more beautiful."

No single group, she said, will be allowed to "monopolize" the park.

There's also an interest in connecting the park uses, with possibly establishing a hiking trail around the perimeter, she said. Public restrooms and an eating establishment on the cultural center grounds also are possibilities and could help inspire people to spend more time taking in all of the offerings at Angels Gate. If new structures are built, they would be put farther back into the park, she said, so as not to distract from any open vistas.

Talks are under way with some school officials about the opportunity to use some separate district space at the park for ball fields near the back of Angels Gate, Loring said.

Uses such as a proposed permanent fenced-in, off-leash dog park, with the lower west section of Angels Gate known as Joan Milke Flores Park being tentatively eyed as a site,

would also have to be coordinated with the city to be included in a recommended master plan, Loring said.

Linda Grimes, who will make a presentation today on behalf of the Golden State Pops Orchestra, said the group wants to offer music conductor workshops and summer music camps at the park. The goal, she said, is to bring more people to the park.

While Proposition K city parks money is available, other funding will likely have to come through additional grants and private sources.

"The first step is getting ideas out there. The funding comes later," Grimes said.

Wolfgram said there is a push to resolve the park issues quickly, noting that many similar attempts have dragged on sometimes for years in San Pedro.

While the park master plan steering committee hopes to come up with recommendations before the end of the year, ultimately it will be the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission that will decide on park uses, Wolfgram said.

A master plan for the park is long overdue.

An earlier effort was never formally approved by the citywide parks commission. It was only after the 2005 signing of a 30-year lease with the Angels Gate Cultural Center that grants and private funding could be secured to conduct the overall review, an expensive undertaking alone.

Plans for the cultural center are being done under a separate but concurrent part of the master plan process.

The former military property was given to the city in 1977, but city fund shortages have prevented many ideas from taking root in the past.

The park is home to the Korean Friendship Bell, the cultural center with artist studios and galleries, the Fort MacArthur (military) Museum, a youth hostel, former military buildings, a Latin-Mass Catholic Church and the Maritime Exchange lookout center.

Meanwhile, the Fort MacArthur Museum Association is conducting a separate effort to have the entire park declared a historic district, which if approved could restrict master plan ideas.

Adjacent school district property at the park, which will not be officially included in the overall master plan, includes a vocational school, the Marine Mammal Care Center and the International Bird Rescue Research Center.

Making presentations today will be:

Korean Friendship Bell Preservation Committee.

Fort MacArthur Museum Association.

San Pedro Youth Coalition.

South Bay Young Marines.

Isaak Walton League.

Golden State Pops Orchestra.

Korean American Economic Development Center.

Other groups interested in making oral presentations at future meetings should contact Wolfgram by e-mailing her at juliann@angelsgateart.org. Written presentations also must be submitted.

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Proposal to seek historical status

SAN PEDRO: But idea for 64-acre Angels Gate Park could get in way of work toward a new master plan.

Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)

July 16, 2007

Author: Donna Littlejohn

STAFF WRITER

Local military historians will nominate all of San Pedro's Angels Gate Park for state historical status, a move that could complicate plans already under way to draft a new master plan for the 64-acre oceanfront park and improve the cultural center there.

"There's nearly a century of military history on that property," said Joe Janesic, vice president of the Fort MacArthur Museum Association.

The association, the volunteer arm of the city-run military museum located in the park, wants to preserve 15 wood-framed buildings that were constructed in 1940 to house young soldiers in the event the nation entered World War II.

"We've been working for several years to make the entire property a historic district so we can tie it all together," Janesic said.

The association is working on a 100-page nomination document, with 250 pages of documentation to back it up, that should be ready to submit for review soon, Janesic said.

The park occupies federal land that was deeded to the city of Los Angeles in 1977 to be used for recreation purposes.

For years, the city had no money to develop a master plan. But now, with a 30-year lease in place for the Angels Gate Cultural Center, private funding has become available for the plan.

Public school facilities within the park will not be affected by the master plan.

In a letter to Michael Shull, planning superintendent for the city's Department of Recreation and Parks, Janesic said the intent is not to interfere with how the World War II-era buildings on the property can be used.

"Our intent is not to deprive the use of the structures, but rather to list them so that future use and planning may be directed towards a 'preservation friendly' development rather than the bulldozer approach," he wrote.

Conflicts could occur, however, if the Angels Gate Cultural Center wants to raze some of the buildings as it moves to expand and improve its artist studios, galleries and possibly build a cafe and theater as part of its campus.

Nathan Birnbaum, executive director of the center, said it's unclear how a historic designation would affect plans, which are still in their early stages. Ideally, the aging buildings, he said, should be analyzed individually to determine their preservation value.

"It's certainly something that's got to be taken into account," Birnbaum said of the historic nomination.

Janesic said if a historic designation is awarded, it would put restraints on how buildings could be modified or changed, adding a state watchdog element to how plans can proceed.

"It gets a third party involved," Janesic said. The tenants of the park, including the cultural center, Young Marines and a railroad club, could remain, he said.

Meanwhile, two public meetings have been held so far to gather public comments on the park's master plan. Suggestions have included sports fields, a designated American Indian site, an off-leash dog park, pedestrian and bike paths, hiking trails, cafe and deli, and additional attractions built around the Korean Friendship Bell.

It will be up to the city's Recreation and Parks Commission to approve a final master plan, which is expected before the end of the year.

As for the historic designation, Janesic said the paperwork is still being compiled but should be sent soon.

After that, there will be a hearing before the state's historic register commission followed by a determination either approving or denying the nomination. All of that, he said, will probably take place before the end of the year.

The ultimate goal, Janesic said, is to develop a historic district connecting National Register properties nearby, including gun batteries still in place. It could include a summer history immersion program for high school students who would experience life as a World War II soldier, living in the barracks, eating in the mess hall and learning about the era.

"We'd take away the cell phones, the digital watches, and teach them how to live together, cook for each other," Janesic said. "It would tell the story to the next generation."

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Angels Gate master plan is in the works Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA) October 9, 2006

Author: Donna Littlejohn

DAILY BREEZE

Overlooking the Pacific Ocean, San Pedro's Angels Gate Park is a community treasure by anyone's standards.

And it's about to take center stage.

Promised years ago but never fully delivered, a master plan for the 64-acre parcel of former federal land given to the city in 1977 could -- finally -- be in the works.

Los Angeles officials have said for years they didn't have the money -- estimated in the hundreds of thousands of dollars -- to conduct a full study of the park that is home to the Korean Friendship Bell.

Now, thanks to last year's signing of a long-term lease for one of the park's major tenants, the Angels Gate Cultural Center, private funding has started to roll in that will help pay for the much-needed review.

"This is an incredibly exciting process," said Nathan Birnbaum, executive director of the center. "People have been waiting 30 years to master plan this park."

The cultural center has managed to bring in funding from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation and the Irvine Foundation, along with contributions from two of San Pedro's neighborhood councils.

Bids have gone out for a consultant to conduct the master plan, and public meetings could begin sometime in the next few months, Birnbaum said. Because the bidding process is still open, Birnbaum declined to say how much money has been collected, only that it is less than half a million dollars.

It is hoped that a master plan could be in place within six to nine months once planning work begins. About \$2 million in Proposition K funds -- a park and open-space measure approved in 1996 -- would be available, as long as a master plan is approved by the city.

The first order of business would be a master plan for the cultural center, which now has a 30-year lease with the city. Plans could include an indoor, state-of-the-art theater and food service. The second part of the study would take in the entire park surrounding the center.

Angels Gate Park, run by the city's Department of Recreation and Parks, has been singled out by numerous groups yearning for space over the years, including youth sports organizations and others proposing war memorials, an American Indian center, a Korean cultural building and a labyrinth walking path.

"The political pressures on a significant piece of real estate like this are enormous," Birnbaum said.

There was a document that was called a master plan drawn up in the 1980s, based upon work by a citizens advisory committee. But it was apparently never ratified by the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission and was intended primarily to fulfill the federal government's requirements to transfer the military property to the city.

Some of the suggestions in that study have been used over the years, including a picnic area and a sports field. But now residents say the park clearly needs a fresh look and a new, more up-to-date plan.

Recalling the occasionally bitter community feud over the White Point property to the west of Angels Gate just a few years ago, however, the debate promises to be intense.

"Groups will line up wanting a piece of Angels Gate Park," said Doug Epperhart, president of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council.

The bluff-top parcel at the southern end of Gaffey Street is thought to be one of the last largely undeveloped coastal properties in the city of Los Angeles.

With plenty of open space and rolling hills, the park now is home to the Korean Friendship Bell, the cultural center with artist studios and galleries, the Fort MacArthur Military Museum (including two National Register historical sites), a youth hostel, former military buildings, a Latin-Mass Catholic Church, and the Marine Exchange lookout center.

Military museum volunteers have long dreamed of preserving the old wartime buildings in the park and restoring the Gaffey Street outdoor swimming pool that has fallen into disrepair.

Open spaces preferred in master plan

Adjacent Los Angeles school district property -- which will not be affected by the master plan -- is home to a vocational school, the Marine Mammal Care Center and the International Bird Rescue Research Center.

There likely will be a strong push in the process to keep much of the space open and not cluttered with new buildings or other structures.

Parks and open space advocate Frank O'Brien, director of the Harbor-Watts Economic Development Corp., said it will be important to keep the process moving quickly and to keep it "genuinely open and transparent."

The focus, he said, should be on the basics that the community can agree upon: lighting, signs, pathways and benches, parking, along with the lease uses already in place at the park.

"What's up there right now basically works," he said. "Nothing major needs to be changed."

"The key thing is not to be held hostage to long-term" proposals that may or may not materialize, O'Brien said. "The city makes simple things overly complicated."

But even as the process to prepare a master plan enters its preliminary phase, there already has been a hint of controversy about the use of park space.

The Iron Circle Nation, a nonprofit, intertribal group of American Indians that has conducted an annual "Gathering of the Elders" at the park since 1992, signed a 10-year agreement -- unbeknownst to many -- two years ago with a city administrator to leave an arbor and sweat lodge structure standing at the park for periodic year-round use.

The sweat lodge sits on cultural center property.

Thinking they were about to be evicted from the parcel, members of the Iron Circle Nation this month appealed to the council office and the city's Recreation and Parks commission to ensure that their agreement was still valid.

A back room deal?

Some community members issued an alarm via e-mail last week that there was a premature, behind-the-scenes deal in the works with the Iron Circle Nation for a permanent presence at the site -- a move they see as circumventing or unfairly "front-loading" the master plan process.

"It should be a public process and what we're asking the council office to do is not precipitously make a decision about land use before the master planning process has gone forward," said June Burlingame Smith, a member of the Angels Gate Park Advisory Board.

The 10-year agreement with the Iron Circle Nation likely won't stand because it was "issued incorrectly," said Sophia Pena-Cortez, who heads the Pacific Region for the city's Department of Recreation and Parks.

The site is considered sacred American Indian land of the Chumash and Gabrielino tribes.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn said she would like to see the group be included in the mix of park uses but added that for now she supports a proposal to relocate the sweat lodge after the annual American Indian gathering later this month.

"I fully support this compromise as well as the (Recreation and Parks) Department's recommendation to allow the Iron Circle Nation to continue use of the facility during the master plan process," Hahn wrote in an e-mail in response to some of the concerns that she said centered around some misinformation.

Pena-Cortez said she has been working with the parties to resolve the differences.

"We're willing to work with them, we're trying to create a win-win situation," Pena-Cortez said. "It's a very sensitive issue, and I know in their hearts they feel like this is 'holy ground.'"

"But it's really all holy ground. It's a beautiful piece of property and we want to respect everyone's opinion. We can agree to disagree in the process, but we want to be respectful."

Caption:

The Iron Circle Nation uses a sweat lodge on Angels Gate Park land, and controversy surrounds its 10-year use agreement that some say circumvented the master plan process. Artists' studios already have replaced military barracks at San Pedro's Angels Gate Park, which could see many changes in the coming years as work begins on a master plan that is expected to bring a series of improvements to the ocean-adjacent park.

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Opening the gates to the city's culture Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA) November 18, 2005

Author: Donna Littlejohn
DAILY BREEZE

A bluff-top artists' co-op housed in World War II bunkers in San Pedro will finally come of age Saturday when the city signs its first long-term lease with the Angels Gate Cultural Center. The 30-year lease is hailed as a new era for the once struggling center that has existed mostly on month-to-month leases at the park for nearly a quarter of a century.

"It's about time," said Lorraine Ornelas, a city parks supervisor who served as the center's first director.

A dispute over Angels Gate Park's overall master plan process and rocky relations with the city's Department of Recreation and Parks in earlier years have until now prevented the collection of artist studios, galleries and classrooms from becoming an officially permanent fixture.

The lease gives both parties the go-ahead to begin more long-range planning on the scenic park site that boasts a panoramic ocean view.

"This is potentially a new era of collaboration between the city and arts groups that will create a beautiful public space for the arts," said Angels Gate Director Nathan Birnbaum, who came on board nearly two years ago.

Large donations and grants will be much easier to come by with a long-term lease in place.

Board member John Greenwood said the agreement also means much-needed physical repairs can be made to the property and aging buildings.

"No one wanted to put money into the facility without a long-term lease," Greenwood said. "The property was getting worse and worse and there was no incentive to improve it on a month-to-month lease."

The public celebration of the lease signing will be at 11 a.m. and will include a ceremony and refreshments.

Established in 1982, Angels Gate Cultural Center provides professional work-studio space for 45 artists, including musicians, ceramists, painters, sculptors, writers, photographers, print makers and jewelers.

The idea grew out of a series of meetings and discussions.

"A number of us were artists and we thought it would be a wonderful location to have a gallery and classes," said Sam Arno of San Pedro, who was involved in the center's beginnings.

In their truly grass-roots movement, Arno and other artists helped remodel the abandoned military bungalows for their new use in the early days.

"We spent a lot of time teetering on ladders," Arno said.

"I remember that Sam Arno and I fixed up the gallery by covering over the windows," said San Pedro artist Muriel Olguin, who was the first artist to get a studio space at the center.

But through the years, the center has sometimes struggled to find its niche in the community. It has offered everything from outdoor theater to poetry readings and dance classes.

The center has recently leaned more heavily toward artwork exhibits, but is now exploring opening up more offerings in the performing arts vein again.

Because Angels Gate Park is a decommissioned military base -- the so-called Fort MacArthur Upper Reservation property was turned over to the city by the military in the 1970s -- supporters are looking to other successful "adaptive reuse" developments, including the Fort Mason Center in San Francisco.

Parks officials and Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn toured that former Navy base site recently for ideas, Birnbaum said.

The area now houses a nationally known theater, bookstores and restaurants and sponsors art exhibits, weekly improvisational shows, plays and other events.

Angels Gate Cultural Arts Center has been doing "pre-planning" work with California architect Michael Rotundi and is focusing on increasing its program base, Birnbaum said. Classes are being added, he said, along with other activities designed to reach out more to the Harbor Area community.

A fund-raising drive will follow planning stages, he said, and money also may be available from grants and such sources as Proposition 40.

The World War II bunkers and other structures will remain in place, Birnbaum said, as part of the historic preservation of the area. Eventually, he would like to develop a historic walk linking different parts of the scenic 62-acre park -- the cultural center sits on just a portion of it -- where there also are public school facilities, the Korean Friendship Bell, a youth hostel, a bird and marine mammal care center and a military museum.

Among future plans in the works for the cultural center is building a small to mid-sized indoor theater space that would be flexible and available for other events and activities as well.

The park's overall master plan could also entertain ideas for other cultural and arts-related proposals.

"This is not going to be a huge project, we're not doing a Disney Hall or the Getty," Birnbaum said. "It's not so much about size as concept.

"We've got this amazing piece of property that's under-used by the public."

Caption:

The Angels Gate Cultural Center provides a professional working space for artists and is also home to galleries, classrooms and individual studios.

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