Grand Avenue Civic Park Workshop #1

A Transcription Of The Live Webcast

Grand Avenue Park, Los Angeles

June 21, 2006
The Norman Lear Center

Founded in January 2000, the Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce and society. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its fellows, conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field. For more information, please visit www.learcenter.org

The Grand Avenue Intervention

Effective urban planning requires direct civic engagement by diverse and disparate communities. The goal of the Grand Avenue Intervention project is to maximize public input into the design of a new 16-acre park in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. In July 2005, the Los Angeles Times published an op-ed by Lear Center director Martin Kaplan calling for a design competition for the new Grand Avenue Civic Park. If public response was strong, the Los Angeles Times offered to open its pages to submissions. Marty Kaplan and the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center agreed to shepherd and oversee the project, which became known as the Grand Avenue Intervention. On December 25, 2005, the Los Angeles Times published three full pages on the project, including submissions, public comments and three articles. In May 2006, the Grand Avenue Committee and The Related Companies, the developer selected for the project, announced that they would incorporate the Grand Intervention designs into their park design process. They have endorsed our online civic engagement efforts, which include Webcasting meetings and workshops; hosting discussion boards; archiving video and transcripts online; digitizing materials distributed at public meetings, and performing surveys.

Participants

Marty Kaplan, Director, Norman Lear Center; Associate Dean, USC Annenberg School for Communication

Brenda Levin, Principal, Levin & Associates

Aaron Paley, President, Community Arts Resources

Mark Rios, Principal, Rios Clementi Hale Studios

Martha Welbourne, Managing Director, Grand Avenue Committee

Bill Witte, President, Related Companies of Southern California
ABOUT THE PARK & THE WORKSHOP

As part of the Grand Avenue Project, the existing County Mall at Los Angeles' Bunker Hill will be transformed into a 16-acre park stretching from the Music Center at the top of the Hill to City Hall at the bottom. This Grand Avenue Park will become the new "Central Park" of Los Angeles, and will be the scene of many city-wide celebrations, as well as daily events. The Grand Avenue Project will also transform the civic and cultural districts of downtown Los Angeles into a vibrant new regional center which will showcase entertainment venues, restaurants, retail and housing. These new uses will add to the notable features that already exist at the top of Bunker Hill, including the Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, the Music Center, the Colburn School of Performing Arts, and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The official Grand Avenue Park Design Team (Brenda Levin, Mark Rios and Aaron Paley), has committed to hosting three community workshops with the purpose of presenting to the public the Park's urban planning issues, as well as inviting all to brainstorm design ideas for the Park.

This transcript of the workshop, which was Webcast from the site of Grand Avenue Park on June 21, 2006, represents the first in a series of public dialogues about the Park. At this workshop, the Park's many planning issues were presented and the public's wants, needs, likes and dislikes were fielded in a q&a session with the design team and developer.

The second workshop will be held on August 19, 2006, at the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy in Little Tokyo. There, the design team will present initial design concepts and invite public comment. The third workshop will be held in September, date, time and location to be determined. Ground-breaking on the Park should begin before the end of the year.

Read more about the development of the Park.

View a Webcast of this first workshop.

Download the Park design team's presentation, complete with color photos and maps.
PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

Martin Kaplan

Martin Kaplan is the director of the Norman Lear Center at USC, and associate dean at its Annenberg School for Communication. A summa cum laude graduate of Harvard, a Marshall Scholar to Cambridge University, and a Stanford Ph.D., he has been an Aspen Institute program officer; a federal education staffer; a Vice President’s chief speechwriter; a Washington journalist in print, television, and radio; a deputy Presidential campaign manager; a Disney Studios vice president of motion picture production; and a film and television writer and producer.

Brenda Levin

Harvard-educated architect Brenda A. Levin runs the urban planning and architecture firm, Levin & Associates, which has revitalized many of Los Angeles’ most-beloved and historic landmarks; the firm is an active problem-solver in the issues and neighborhoods of a complex city and region. Its renovation and adaptive re-use work has included the James Oviatt, Fine Arts, and Bradbury buildings, the Grand Central and Chapman markets, Pellessier Building and Wiltern Theater, and the seismic rehabilitation of City Hall. In process are the renovation of Griffith Observatory and the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings at Barnsdall Park.

Aaron Paley

Aaron Paley is the president of Community Arts Resources, Los Angeles’ leading and most experienced community and cultural festival producer; he is also the founder of Yiddishkayt Los Angeles, the largest organization devoted to Yiddish culture on the West Coast.

Mark Rios

Mark Rios has been a principal at Rios Clementi Hale Studios since 1985. He is also associate professor at USC’s School of Architecture, and is director of its Landscape Architecture Dept.

Martha Welbourne

Martha Welbourne is the managing director of the Grand Avenue Committee, which hopes to transform the civic and cultural districts of downtown Los Angeles into a new regional center to showcase entertainment venues, restaurants, retail, a hotel, and up to 2,000 new housing units.

Bill Witte

Bill Witte is president of the Related Companies of Southern California, a real estate developer with offices in California, Florida and New York. Related has overseen development of such mixed-use urban development projects as the Time Warner Center in New York, and City Place in West Palm Beach, Florida.
Aaron Paley: I hope all of you can see and hear; I'm sorry for the technical difficulties. I'm Aaron Paley with Community Arts Resources, we’re part of the design team. I’m really happy to welcome you here tonight; this is a very exciting day for us. On behalf of all of us on the team, Rios Clementi Hale Studios, and Brenda Levin, Architects, the three firms who are working together to bring this, I welcome you. I’m also proud to present, to introduce Martha Welborne of the Grand Avenue Committee.

[Applause]

Martha Welbourne: I'd also like to welcome everyone to the first event in the park under this new effort to create an even better park than what exists here now, on behalf of the Joint Powers Authority, the Los Angeles Authority and the Grand Avenue Committee, all of which I represent. We had some JPA award members here awhile ago, and others may show-up, and if they do, we'll bring them right up here.

But tonight, we’re really here to focus on the park, itself, not on the building project, which we met with many of you on about a month ago. This focus is just on the park.

It says here on the screen "Workshop No. 1," but as many of you know, last year, we also had other workshops, but at this point, with the approval of the master plan, we’re now into a new phase of the design of the park; this is a phase that will result in the actual park that will be built. We now have a budget, and have a lot more design and experience with this process under our belts; we know a lot more than we did about a year ago.
So, with that in mind, I would like to turn it over to Bill Witte, who is the President of the Related Companies in Southern California. He will introduce the civic park design team. Bill?

[Applause]

Bill Witte: Thank you, Martha. Thank you. This is the first of what will be three public hearings on the civic park. And as I think you can see from the hordes around you, Aaron and the team did a really great job. The objective tonight is specifically to hear from the public, and get ideas about the use of the park, following a presentation of the design team about its history, which is what we’ll have here today.

We were charged by the Joint Powers Authority with overseeing the process to design and implement improvements to the civic park. And so we did the smart thing: we went and found the best people we could find in the city to really run this effort. You’ve met Aaron. You’ll soon hear from Brenda Levin, Principal of Levin & Associates Architects, and from Mark Rios of Rios Clementi Hale, who I think are an exceptional team covering architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, and programming of the park. They’re going to walk you through some of our thoughts, background, and concepts, and we’ll take it from there.

So, with that, let me turn it over to Brenda Levin.

Brenda Levin: Thank you, Bill.

Maybe we should start by orienting you just a little bit on the civic park,
the location of the civic park and its relationship to Lot Q, which is the first phase of the development and design with Frank Gehry Development.

We’re sitting in the civic park right now, along with what we refer to as Lot Q. These two sites are tied together, and the JPA dictates that they are open currently, both the park and Lot Q. So what was the design team asked to do? We developed a scope of work based on conversations with Grand Avenue Committee and the Related Company, we focused on research and documentation, community operating, with the final product being a pre-schematic design for the park.

So we are in our community workshop programming phase; we’re about halfway through our process. We started in April, and are going to complete the schematic design in September. As you’ve heard, there will be three workshops. The second one is August 19th, a Saturday, and it will be held at the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy in Little Tokyo; you will all hear more about that in the future.

We obviously wanted to build on all the good work that’s been done to date, so we began our process by looking at the previous design proposals. We assembled all of the studies, all the way back to the 1909 City Beautiful proposal through the Grand Intervention that the Lear Center led in 2005.

Starting with the 2006 Park Workshop and moving backwards, there’s the First Street plan, the SOM master plan, the Grand Avenue Realignment, 2003 Reimagining Grand Avenue which led to the
formation of the JPA, and the development project. Some of you remember the downtown strategic plan in '89. There was also the Ten-Minute Diamond, the Maguire Partners Development Team for Bunker Hill. There was the Luckman Plan in '59. In '66, the River Center Mall was completed.

And then working back, of course, the Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan which really focused on parks in Los Angeles: of course, we would have been in great stead if that plan had been implemented. There was the Bunker Hill Redevelopment, and back, as I said, to the Robinson Plan of City Beautiful, finally to the initial plan for the City, the 1849 Plan. So we are also building on the work that’s been done before, which is the SOM Design Concept Plan, which pertained to all of the blocks of the development site, as well as the civic park.

We tried to summarize the great work of the Lear Center with the Grand Intervention Project: you see the boards out there. This is really a sampling of the many projects that they received. What we tried to do was summarize the major categories for these projects: they fell into the creation of large-scale gathering places, restaurants, places for art, places for quiet reflection, urban gardens. What you can see on the board is a summary of the major themes, as well as the number of submittals that included those themes.

We also gathered examples of case studies of urban parks and specific plazas from around the world to help develop the criteria for creating a public space for a diverse population. And so we looked, at first, not locally, but nationally, at some parks that have some similarities to them to our park. We’ll go through each one individually.

Part of the similarities to Rockefeller Center in New York is that it is bounded by buildings similar to this civic park. It also has some activity generators, and we all know the ice rink and water features in the middle, some quiet areas and some active areas.

Pioneer Square, Courthouse Square in Portland, is a park in the center of town. It’s multilevel: it uses the steps to both transition grade, but also to create activities. It also has a major water
feature; it has a bookstore and a Starbucks to activate the space. And there are cultural facilities around the park.

Bryant Park in New York City, which is bounded by the New York Public Library, has a beautiful great lawn which is used for both passive use, as well as programmed functions. It also has a series of allées along the sides; one of the things that’s very interesting about Bryant Park is that all seating is flexible, moveable: you can reconfigure the park seating area on a daily basis. There are also some kiosks, and vendors, and food, and actually, a bar.

Yerba Buena in San Francisco is another park. What’s interesting and relates to our park is that it’s divided by a street – there’s a pedestrian bridge between the two areas of the park. Both are large, active spaces. And, again, it’s surrounded by cultural institutions, not unlike our Grand Avenue.

Finally, Millenium Park in Chicago is probably our most recent example of a new urban park with a great lawn. There’s a pedestrian bridge over main vehicular circulation, containing both passive and active recreation; there’s cultural facilities. Softscapes, and hardscapes, and, obviously, a liaison of trees, and a major water feature. And, of course, there are the art pieces that are really significant in Millenium Park.

We’ve also looked at parks internationally around the world with the specific plazas, basically, prototypes of the use of parks in culturally diverse populations.

One of the things that has been fascinating about our work to date is to review the history of our site and its evolution over time. We’ve
examined the way the site has evolved, back from 1900 all the way to present day. We’ll go through each one.

This is the Civic Park in 1906. If you see the dotted line, you see that Court Street drives right up the middle of it. You see that Spring Street had a kink in it. And then there was another street that now sits on the other side of the freeway, New High Street.

Here’s the site in 1930: you see the Courthouse, the new Hall of Records, and Court Street, still in place, but also the introduction of City Hall. And you begin to see the reference to City Beautiful and the east-west access that is still retained today.

Then, of course, in the ’60’s the Bunker Hill development started – we started to raise the hill, and so, we lost the fine texture of the site, and were really introduced to super blocks. The Hall of Records was still there until the Hall of Administration was in place, but the Courthouse is down. The State Office Building was here until about the ’80’s. The Law Library, the County Court, as we know it, and the Hall of Administration, and, of course, the development of the Music Center were all in place.

Finally, in 2006, for those of you who took the tour, much has remained the same, with the exception of an on-grade parking lot that’s been developed adjacent to City Hall. This is one of our opportunities to actually plant and grade: it’s the only space in the civic park that is not on top of structure.

We thought it would be interesting for you to see a composite of the development of downtown, and in particular, this area, and how it has
evolved and changed over the years. As you see, there’s a scale of difference in the city fabric. We also wanted to look at open space in the adjacent areas of the downtown region, so we looked at the existing conditions and the open space. This circle reflects a 10-minute walking circle, and you can see the major freeways and the neighborhoods surrounding downtown. Here, the park is noted.

As you come in a little bit closer, you begin to really see what the frame of reference is in terms of neighborhoods, Central City, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, the Arts District, the financial district, the Convention Center, all sort of in this region. And that really there are very few parks in this area, with the exception of getting over to Vista Hermosa, we’ll look at that in a second. This represents about six-tenths of a mile, five to six blocks, about 1.2 miles in the circle.

We did look at local resources because we’re trying to make sure that we provide a park that has resources that aren’t elsewhere in the region, so we’ve identified which parks have active recreation, which ones are more passive, which ones have performance venues. You can see two pictures of the notable parks in the region.

We also wanted to look at ways to connect to the community. One of the issues with this park is that it’s very internally focused. But we really do want to try to find ways to connect to Little Tokyo and the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy where the next workshop is going to be. There are some districts, there are landmarks, there are cultural institutions that surround this that are actually being developed, including the new performing arts high school.

We also see there’s some view corridors, the connections from the center of the park trying to make these connections back along all roads to Disney Hall to Lot Q obviously preserving these major view corridors to the Music Center and the City Hall is critical.

So what existing conditions are we dealing with? Well, we have the park that runs between Grand Avenue and Spring Street, interrupted by Hill and Broadway. We have the Music Center, the Department of Water and Power, the Lang fountain, a central plaza where the Starbucks is.
The Court of Flags, where we’re in right at the moment, probably has never seen this much activity before today. It has a surface parking lot.

What are the barriers to access? Well, in addition to the fact that the park is completely surrounded, with the exception of this southeast corner, by buildings, so it is internal, the park also has some barriers in the upper ramps at Grand Avenue and at Hill Street. And, of course, there’s the vertical separation here at the Court of Flags.

The topography is such that it is 70 feet between Grand Avenue, right here, and First Street, the steps going up to City Hall. There are two distinct grade changes, one is Grand Avenue, which is about 18 feet, and the other here is the Court of Flags, which is about 15 feet. And so while it is gentle, as you look at it on a site section, when you walk it, it’s not quite the same.

So, again, we have opportunities and constraints. Our constraints are perhaps these ramps, and the grade changes that we’ve identified. We have some opportunities, we have this fountain, we have some monuments in the park, all of these red dots are various monuments that are documented. There are wonderful views from the top of Grand to City Hall, and from right here, as you turn around and look at City Hall, some fabulous views.

We have the Metro rail portal here, which is a wonderful asset. And we have some blank walls, basically, to the Hall of Records and the Law Library, which might provide some interesting opportunities as we begin to talk about programming.

We have an initial budget for this project of about $51 million: the bulk
of that money is coming from the agreement in the JPA for the basic land lease of Lot Q, and is going into the park.

There are infrastructure and modifications issues, including the ramps, and utilities and public restrooms. There are new amenities that we’d like to think about. Site work that needs to be done for landscape and hardscape, repair and maintenance issues, as well a streetscape, which will all be included as part of this budget.

So, as Martha mentioned, we’ve been doing community outreach for a fairly long time. This is the first workshop of this design team, but the Related Company and the Grand Avenue Committee have been doing community outreach for a while. They’ve held five workshops in downtown South LA, East Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, and on the West side.

We had a lot of feedback and interest in the park, and there’s some themes, again, that have emerged that are really not that different from the Lear Center themes, nor from some of the themes that we’ve highlighted to you today in terms of making the park truly urban. They include: reflect the diversity of Los Angeles, make it green, make it safe, appeal to families, incorporate high-quality design, and probably, most importantly, the 24/7 environment.

So, that’s our research. I’d like to turn it over to Mark Rios, who will walk us through some of our design strategies and take you up to our workshop that will follow.

Mark Rios: Thank you, Brenda.

Obviously, this is an exciting time for a design team to be here tonight, to share with you our research to date, and some initial ideas we’ve been generating. The majority of this talk is going to involve sitting around tables in the shade, over there, and trying to go through the same process we’ve been going through, thinking about program, and trying to understand where the program might fit in the scope of other world-class parks.
Tonight’s goal really questions what the most important things are that you want to do in the park, and where those things might start being spatially allocated. I think we have another two workshops coming up where we will be talking about specific design solutions, but tonight, we really want to focus on what the program might be.

We keep talking about this project as remaking a public space – we already have a public space here. I think we all say that it has some things about it that work, and a lot of things that maybe don’t work. We’re really looking at how we take, and remake, and re-create this into a very active successful public space.

As a team, we’ve identified four goals for the project: one is to make this park into a unique destination point for everyone in Los Angeles. Number two, make it connect in logical ways: connect for pedestrians, connect from mass transit, connect through automobiles, connect visually, how do we really create access to the project for lots of different modes of interaction? Number three, how do we make it active? I think that all of us know that if you make a big open space, there’s no guarantee that anybody is every going to use it. The only way you make an open space successful is through very clear programming. Really understanding various possibilities for requirements, constraints, the program, how do we design those into the place and making them active and essential? Finally, number four, how do we make a place for all of us, considering this incredible diversity that we have? How do we incorporate as much of the ideology and culture and history of this place into opportunities that might inspire the park?

So, with that, many of these things are ideas that we’ve talked about through the prior workshops. They’re ideas that we’re discussing
tonight, about the park’s identity and sustainability, really trying to find ways of taking the topography and turning it into an advantage, as opposed to a separation. Looking at LA as a source of ideology, how that might percolate through into ideas for the park? And, overall, how do we make this a really beautiful, wonderful experience for all of us?

I think probably the connective aspects of the park are its biggest problem today – nobody knows it’s here. How do we make it more visible? How do we make it more part of the routine, for everyone here, and how do we make it more visible for people from outside of the area, who will come to this park. So another factor involves connections to transit, to views, to the streets that bisect the park are essential.

Number three is, again, making the park active: looking at the variety of experiences and programs that might be able to be undertaken here, and really understanding what all those requirements are. How do we service them, how do we build all the infrastructure, how do you make them easy to operate? These will really determine the success of the park.

Finally, trying to make the park appeal to the diversity of Angelenos, as far as age, culture, and lifestyle. How do we bring scale to this place? I know this scale is very, very large – we want to bring down the scale on how to make it safe: how do we make it be easily maintained so that it can perpetuate itself in a very positive way?

We’ve asked you to help identify what your priorities are as far as programs and goals are concerned. It’s really fun to go over and look at the board now, and see all of these green dots everywhere: lots of green dots on the shade and garden, and plant vegetative places.
Directionally, it’s surprising there’s a huge number of dots pasted on the street pedestrian crossings, so we must need bridges here.

If you haven’t gone and weighed in on the kinds of activities you think would be great for the park, please do so before you leave tonight, that’s really our main focus. I think a lot of these activities are not exclusive of one another: although we’ve asked you to prioritize them, a lot of the activities can actually happen in the same places, but we want to know what the ranges are.

We based them in a few large categories. The first category is that of large gatherings. I think this is very, very special for this particular location because this park should be really the park for the city, as it’s really in the heart of the city. It has our prime government and institutional residences surrounding it, and so we need to figure out how to make this a place for special events and gatherings, ceremonies. How we make it operate both in the day and night is also very, very important to us. And how we provide all the infrastructure so those kinds of things can happen is really essential to making successful, large event and gathering spaces.

We also really believe that unless you can buy food in the park, that we won’t be that successful: the incorporations of cafés and restaurants, some kinds of markets, are really essential. There are quite a few parks that we can point to that intended to have food vendors or restaurants, but they never opened up for a whole variety of service and health department reasons: those have proved to be very problematic. So we’re really trying to look at all those issues, and how to solve them so we can make sure that we can incorporate restaurants, cafés, farmers markets, the kinds of things that make it a place that people really want to go to.

Also, in addition to these big gathering places, we want to make sure that we have smaller places for activities in the park – I think what’s really important about this is that things have to happen in a park simultaneously. There’s only one event in the park: you go to that event, and it may be fine, but what might be more productive is to have more than one thing happening at a time, where you can go and see a variety of things in the park. If we can really find a way to ensure that something can always be happening in the park... So, smaller activities are probably the way to
make that happen. Large activities might happen once a week, once a month, but you know, it’s the smaller activities that really need to be thought out, and planned, and programmed.

Individual spaces are also essential. There needs to be places in the park that work on a smaller scale, that provide amenities for all of us to come at lunchtime or on weekends, and enjoy the opportunities here. I think one of the things that’s very important that we will design are the quiet spaces, with these design spaces fulfilling large gathering requirements. We also want to provide smaller, intimate retreat kinds of spaces.

And unexpected surprises! How do anticipate them, how do you design for something that’s unexpected? I’m not quite sure, but I think it’s actually about providing opportunities for things to happen. So we’re also trying to look at the sorts of things that bring people to parks, and find out what intrigues them, and what surprises them.

Urban gardens are an essential thing that we’ve heard a lot of people talk about, and so whether the gardens are about sustainable issues, or about ecological issues, they’re educational – all those things are important to designing this park, and trying to find a way that those gardens can actually start in an [inaudible] circulation systems and activity places for the park.

Has everybody seen the fountain before tonight? Yes, everybody has seen the fountain. A few of you haven’t? The fountain is like one of the hidden gems, at least that’s our opinion; we’ll see what your opinion is tonight. Water is essential for drawing people, for creating activity. It’s a dynamic resource, and so we’re looking at different ways that water can be used both in active manners, and quiet, more passive manners.

Art and play: art is essential for storytelling – who we are, and what our values are as a cultured society. And so the incorporation of artists in our design process would be essential. And sometimes play happens in structured ways, and also, in unstructured ways. I think we all hope there can be unstructured play activities in this park.
We’ve spent some time looking at some design strategies, and we thought it might be helpful to go through those with you. They’re really the key fundamental steps that we’re starting to look at in regards to how you organize and design this particular place. So, let’s go through those.

One of the first and perhaps the most important design subject is how do we provide access in the park? Access, again, as Brenda has talked about, deals with sort of the ramps at Grand Avenue – there is another ramp down by City Hall. How do we make those connections happen in a much more powerful way?

Number two, how do we accommodate some of the new urban movement patterns? This particular site was developed under a lot of new facilities we have, including the new police stations for the public plaza outside the City Hall, the cathedral, the concert hall. Various new buildings are starting to be built in this Civic Center area which change the way people have moved. We think that this new park should be able to reinforce, and work with those new movement patterns.

Number three, how do we acknowledge the streets, Swing Street and Broadway, that actually bisect the park? How do we actually take the park and pull it out to First Street, pull it out to Temple? The park actually feels like it’s this big, as opposed to this big. I think these streets are essential in the entrance sequence, the getting to this place.

Number four, how do we start and locate programs appropriately? When you start thinking about all the various parameters of the existing buildings, how the subway station is located, where the bus routes are, a program starts allocating itself in different kinds of ways. This part of
the site probably may end up having more highly programmed places to it because of issues of accessibility. And this part of the site may have more past program features, based on the Courthouse, the Hall of Administration. So we’re trying to look at how, in a sense, the site designs itself based on all of the contextual issues.

Number five, I think the thing we’ve heard maybe the most in talking to lots and lots of people is that they really want to have this green space in the center of the city. We keep thinking of this as this gigantic green carpet through the extension of the Music Center, all the way down to City Hall. Now there may be places you cross through it, you move through it, places you can occupy for performances, but its overall character really feels as though it’s this huge green landscape, passing through the city.

Number six, there are all sorts of shortcuts that we’d like to be able to take through this park; if we really acknowledge those shortcuts, people will actually use the park more; for example, the Metro is a location that people are using to enter this place. How do you get from there down to there? Or, for example, where’s the entry to the cathedral? Right now, we’re sort of walking down Temple across Hill Street here. If there are other ways of making these sorts of connections and diagonal links, it’ll make the park tie more into the urban fabric.

Number seven, we think it’s very important to acknowledge the history of this particular place, and we think we can build this into a new park. This acknowledgement solves all of these sort of aspirations that we collectively have: it can acknowledge the existence of prior street patterns, some of the sort of original city development blocks, the Courthouse administration, the idea of the large-scale space by the City
Beautiful movement connecting the City Hall with the Music Center. We want to find a way to have a memory of those various parts of our urban life captured in the new park design.

Number eight, we want to see the spectacular. We want to try to find a way to really make some fantastic things happen here; we want the park to work in local ways, and to work in quiet ways; we want to have the park be this really unique special thing where everybody wants to bring their friend and their family to see what’s happening. And so it may end up being about the fountain, it may end up being about the movement patterns, it may end up being about the bridge across a street, it may be end up being about a band shell. How do we have these spectacular things happen?

And, finally, how do we anticipate for the future? We’re all thinking that in a way, our first phase will be laying the groundwork for a park that’s going to continue to evolve. The $50 million budget that Brenda talked about is a lot of money, and a lot of that money is going to be spent on infrastructure, dealing with the ramps, dealing with the grading. It will go very, very fast.

So we’re trying to find a way the park can have extended life and extended design. One of the things we’re looking at, for example, has been included in conversations about the Courthouse and the Hall of Administrations. If those facilities might be relocated at some point in time, how would that change the park? How do we build something that can endeavor transformation in the future, if other land is available? Part of our charge collectively is to be really looking at this now, but also to plan for the future.
And so tonight we’re going to ask all of you participate, and get involved with this. We put together this tool kit, and we’re going to reconvene after some questions at our two tables. We have this set of parts, and each one of the parts has a name on it, and deals with spaces and activities. We’re going to ask you to give some input on how you think the park might be organized, and what program parts might be on it.

At each one of the tables, we’re going to have this base plan that shows the park location, a plan with the existing park on it. On this slide are your instructions on how to go about this process: I think that at first, it may seem a little daunting, but I have a feeling that everyone is really going to get into it tonight.

If you look at the next image, there’s a couple of steps to this process which I think will be really helpful. The first step we’re inviting you to think about involves the renovation aspects: some of the really big items for the park that we’re struggling with have to do with the ramps, the fountain, the lawn, the plaza. And so the first thing to be thinking about is, what are the big moves? And how would you prioritize them?

The second way to pursue this process is to be thinking about the various spaces and zones, gardens, plazas, lawns: ask yourself how you would enter those spaces? You’ll find in the park, with all these pieces, that you could actually start laying the ground plan to define those places within the park.

The third course of action is to think about the features and activities that will go into those places, like, "Okay, we might have a lawn here." What are all the events that might happen, what are the program pieces that would go into those types of spaces?

And, finally, the fourth part of the process involves looking at your movement patterns, walkways, bridges, paths, and how they link things together. In the abstract, this sounds a little complicated, but believe it or not, we’ve been through this process before. It’s a little messy, but it’ll be a lot of fun.
Here’s another workshop with these same kinds of pieces: everybody actually gets into it, and really starts lobbying for what they want. We want to see you go through the same struggle we’ve been going through.

So, that’s our plan of attack here tonight, and in just a couple of minutes we’re going to reconvene at the tables. We’re going to have probably 45 minutes to do these experiments, and get your input on them. We’re going to ask everybody to take these plans down on the board, and then after another 45 minutes, we’re all going to get up, and move around, and look from table to table at everybody’s work tonight.

We’re going to use this as a very valuable tool during the course of our design process. And in our next design workshop, in about seven weeks or so, you’re going to see the results of all of your work synthesized into three different design schemes.

This is a really value contribution. We’ve gone through it, we need you to go through it, also. And we want to look at the similarities and differences, the things that come to the surface. I think we’re really trying to have a process that respects all of our sort of collective ideas.

Aaron Paley: Thanks, Brenda and Mark, for that great presentation!

[Applause]

Now what we’re going to do is have a question-and-answer period: I see lots of questions, a lot of hands up. What I’m going to ask you to do is use the mike, which is over here in the back, because we are actually being Web-cam’ed, and people can hear you and see you. We are sharing this with Net viewers all over America and the world, right now, courtesy of the Lear Center.

So, here’s the first question, a couple of you line-up there.
Mario: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Mario. Someone was nice enough to e-mail me the invitation for tonight’s event. And I was wondering how people in communities who don’t have e-mail access who are reading the LA Times are being brought into this dialogue?

Aaron Paley: Well, we placed ads in I think eight community papers. We translated them into Korean, and Spanish, and Japanese, and Chinese, so that was one thing. We were on the radio in advance of this. And then we also did flyer distribution all downtown. There are also e-mails that went out to, for all the County employees, and other different networks of e-mails.

So all I would say is we’re working in an open process: we feel that the community process isn’t over. The next meeting is August 19th. We want your help, we enlist you to help us get the word out, as well.

Brady Westmore: My name is Brady Westmore, and my question is how much of the infrastructure dollars are being allocated for the ramps? How much of the infrastructure in actual dollars can you give the ramps?

Brenda Levin: Actually, we don’t really know the answer to that. We’ve just begun exploring how to deal with the ramps; there is part of the environmental impact statement addresses them, and we’re beginning that process right now. Hopefully, tonight will actually help us inform how much everybody feels the removal of the ramps is important to the project, in this first phase.

Mark Rios: At our next community meeting, we’ll have the redesign schemes: I’m sure we’ll then have a variety of solutions to keep ramps
Will the people of color who live two blocks from here who want to come over and use this park be denied access?

and get rid of the ramps, to see how they really affect the park. I think some people have been very adamant in their belief that in order to make the park work, the connections are really, really important. We understand how important they are, though we also understood how much they cost.

Al Sabo: Hi. My name is Al Sabo, and I live in this area. So far, I’ve heard that this project is for a diverse community, and you’ve been exploring the issue of how to attract people from all over the city to use this park.

Now, being a diverse community, if we go three blocks east, there are a lot of people of color and ethnicity that sometimes are left out of parks, such as this. A prime example is Pershing Square where, if anybody has been down there recently, the restrooms are closed to people of color, to people who look disheveled, to the general public, to most of the general public. The excuse they get away with is “Well, if you park in their parking lot, you alone can use those facilities.” They took out the water fountains. People actually drink out of the waterfall that’s in the park.

What safeguards have you put into this project to protect the average citizen? Will the people of color who live from two blocks from here who want to come over and use this park be denied access? I’m concerned, because it happened at Pershing Square, and dammit, I don’t want to see it happen here!

Aaron Paley: I think we all agree with you, and we’re as concerned as you are about this project. And I can say, on behalf of the team, we’re really trying, at the end of this process, to create a new civic space that
serves all Angelenos: that it not become a place that has some type of barriers up that separate this place, like classes. This is actually 'the' space that serves as the opportunity to connect the different parts of LA together.

What we’re doing is we’re starting down at Spring Street and Broadway, we’re hoping to reinforce those north/south connections. I mean, I’d love to see the people who walk on Broadway on the weekends walk a couple more blocks up, have a great place for their kids to play, have something to do that changes their Saturdays and Sundays.

We’d like to create a place that different community groups would use on a regular basis to create their community festivals, so that you’d be able to come and have the Latino Festival, or the Mime Festival, or the Yiddish Festival down there, or whatever, so it is that that’s an easy place down there or make it somewhere here where that can happen.

We want the amenities that exist here to attract a wide variety of people so that everyone feels safe and secure. Right now, we have a situation where we’ve heard over and over again that the homeless are here, and they own this park, the Court of Flags, and people only want to walk through, they don’t want to stay and linger. I think it’s fine for the homeless to be here, but it’ll also have to be a safe enough place that people feel that whoever they are, they want to be here, too. So, this should be a place where everyone can take part.

Mark Rios: Many of the people who live two or three blocks from here are in a lower socio-economic structure. What I’m more interested in is your concession stands, etcetera, the type of concession stands that actually these people can afford to come to.

Aaron Paley: Again, that’s why we’re here tonight – we’re here to get your ideas about what should be here. We’re not at a place where we’re saying this is what the park is going to be: we’re at a place where we’re saying, "Tell us what the park should be."

So we’re going to put that down, that that’s what should be here: there should be a variety of
price points so that all different kinds of people can come here – for example, we have Mama’s Tamales here tonight. I think that’s a great economic model for what this park could do.

They’re working at MacArthur Park, providing job opportunities for people in that neighborhood to actually develop their own businesses, as they have a community incubator kitchen: the people who create the tamales work there in the kitchen, and then go off and create their own catering businesses. They also have the first legal sidewalk vending system in the whole city, where the company can legally sell inside the park. That created job opportunities for the neighborhood, as well as cheap and good food, and everybody gained. That’s the kind of model we’d like to see, as well.

Al Sabo: Thank you.

What role do you hope technology will play in the park?

Marty Kaplan: Hi, I’m Marty Kaplan from the Norman Lear Center. Besides doing a live Webcast, we also have a live discussion board for people who are watching online to talk to each other, and to you. And so on their behalf, dozens of questions are coming in. I’m just going to start with two of them, two quick ones, not from me, but from them.

One is, "What impact will the Gehry Building in Lot Q have on the design of the park?" Another is, "What role do you hope technology will play in the park?"

Mark Rios: Two great questions. As far as the Gehry Building goes, I think we really need all the neighbors around the park to be very, very
active to draw people here. And so we’re looking at Frank’s budget in regards to the lot’s entrances – how you get to it, how you move through it, the ways to make the connection through network park and this place complete. We’re not looking at just that project, we’re also looking at all the other places around the area. So it’s one of the contextual neighbors here, that’s essential to make this place successful.

And as far as technology, I think we really want to capture the imagination of what technology provides for day and outdoor events. And so having access through technologies, and having technologies to make performances, different things might happen in the evening… This will be how technology informs art.

Linda: Hi. My name is Linda, and I’m a Central City East community resident. After listening to your presentation, the first thing that struck me is there’s going to be a whole lot of job opportunities here. As you know, we’re the largest homeless capitol in the world. Do you think this project is going to help ease that problem here in Los Angeles? Will there be jobs for our homeless and poor? Are our low-income people going to be able to have an opportunity yet?

Bill Witte: There will be a whole series of jobs throughout this development, including during the construction phase of the park, as well as during the operations and maintenance part of the park: there will be efforts made. There will be a formal agreement that, in fact, will specify a program for reaching out to the communities around this park and around and including downtown, to train and hire residents for the jobs that are specifically being provided.

Now, a lot of them will be union jobs, so arrangements will have to be
made with those specific unions or apprenticeship programs, as appropriate. But the answer to
the question is yes, and by the time of the next public hearing, there should be more detail
presented to the public on that. I will finally say that the idea very clearly is to have those in the
works before all of the actual programming gets started, so that when jobs actually do become
available, people are trained for them.

Linda: Thank you.

Aaron Paley: Okay, we have how many still in line? I would like five more minutes of questions.
Let’s go to you right here. Yes, speak into the mike.

Joe Jamas: My name is Joe Jamas. As I was looking at the arrangements of the park here, one
thing that I did not see was whether they’re going to have medical accessibility in the park, say, if
something were to happen and if you have to go to a hospital, or something like that. I think
that’s very important when you have a major park, such as this one, that you would have
accessibility to these sorts of resources.

Aaron Paley: Major medical. I think if you’re going to participate in the exercise out there, put
down that that’s what you’re looking for, and we’ll make a note of it. It’s the kind of thing that
I’d hope our police and fire departments would be able to respond to because they’re all located
fairly close by. But I know that the California Endowment, which is looking at the health of
Californians, has been talking about the idea of how to get out to people, and could you have
clinics in parks? So it’s not something that might be out of the question to explore. Thank you,
that is a really important point.

Marc Porter Zasada: Hi. My name is Marc Porter Zasada from KCRW Radio. LA has created many
great parks over the last 100 years: Pershing Square, MacArthur Park were all great parks at one
time. But all of them went to seed when neglected. What’s your long-term strategy? I know that
Bryant Park in New York has a private foundation that runs the park, and as a result, it has all
that great programming. All that programming could be going on here now, but it’s not. I didn’t see anything in the budget for programming, either. What’s your long-term strategy?

Aaron Paley: Well, my role on the team is to advocate for just that kind of thing, and I’m hoping that we can find out a way to build in an endowment for this. Martha is jumping to answer this.

Martha Welborne: The truth is, we haven’t figured that all out yet. But we’re in the process of doing so, as we are with the design. But the intent is very clear to have a non-profit entity of some type operate, manage, maintain the park, and do all the programming, and everything.

One model that I might point out you to is the following: The Music Center is also owned by the County, but they have a lease with the County, and operate both the interior of the building, itself, and the exterior. They own the plaza, they own the space.

This may be one model for us. I’m not saying the park is like a Music Center, I’m saying it’s just some sort of non-profit entity. We’re looking at a lot of options, and we’re very aware of their repercussions. And with $50 million, it’s tough to carve it up into endowments, constructions, and everything else we need to carve it up into. But, you know, it’s a good starting point, so that’s where we’re going.

And, yes, ultimately, as Bill is pointing out, we want the park to be able to pay for itself so that we have a variety of events, some that actually make money for the park, and some that are just, you know, totally free to community groups and festivals. And somehow, we have to craft a
budget to allow that to happen.

Marc Porter Zasada: Will Related control the park after it’s built?

Martha Welborne: No.

Marc Porter Zasada: No? So it’ll be up to the County.

Martha Welborne: Related’s responsibility right now is to assist in the design, construction, and the implementation of the park – the County will always be the owner. And if the County chooses to engage with a non-profit to operate and maintain it, that non-profit would have a board. Who will sit on that board, I don’t know yet.

Kelly O’Brien: Thank you. I’m Kelly O’Brien. In the articles, it suggests that our fountain, which we’ve had for many years, might be in the way of some of the proposed new plans. When it was asked how many people here had seen the fountain, I didn’t see a lot of hands. I have a very big interest in this fountain – it’s called the Lang Fountain. It was built and designed when the Music Center and this whole mall was built, and my uncle, Larue Lang, was the designer, the architect of this mall, and the fountain. He was sent back to the board to redesign it after they said it wasn’t big enough for future development if we develop the mall.

Then they had to put in bigger motors to run the fountain because it wasn’t high enough. If you do go up and stand between the Music Center and look down the mall, when the water is running, it frames our City Hall.

Now, our parents, and grandparents, and some of us paid taxes and built that fountain, and it was built to be here forever. And somebody said, “Well, it might be in the way of a proposal, so they might take it away.”

Anyway, that group has their cheerleaders, I think we ought to have our cheerleaders. Please go
up and see it, it’s so beautiful. It was extremely expensive at the time, but they went and made it bigger, and more beautiful so that it could be here, and be the start of this whole mall from there. To take it out would be just like taking the Trevi Fountain out of Rome, and taking the Eiffel Tower down in Paris. It is our fountain, the Lang Fountain in Los Angeles. We have a lot of children that you say are going to come around here...

Aaron Paley: Thank you. I think we've got the point. Actually I’m going to ask the next people to state your question, but I think that – you want to add something?

Kelly O’Brien: I just want to say...

Aaron Paley: What we are trying to do here is get an idea from the public, both via the Web, via the surveys online, and from people here what they would like. Now, let’s see, how many of you want to keep the fountain, right now? Raise your hands.

Unidentified Audience Member: Yeah!

Aaron Paley: Actually, not as many as you might have thought. But still your voice has been heard, and please continue to participate with us. Next question.

Kelly O’Brien: You heard that, and you know what it’s all about.

Aaron Paley: Again, I want to do this really quickly because we really want to start the next thing. Please state your question.

Unidentified Audience Member: I have more of a statement. The center of the city is the Plaza on Olvera Street. That’s when all the mapping was done, and everything. I keep seeing you trying to make the center City Hall or Grand Avenue. It’s not the case, it’s always been diverse in LA, but it’s been diverse from that point. I think you need to design with that in mind – it’s not going to change.
Aaron Paley: I think we represent LA, the multi-nodal city already with many centers, the historic centers, the retail center…

Unidentified Audience Member: Los Angeles is a Spanish city, unlike the rest of the country that was based on the British system, and the Plaza is important to that.

Aaron Paley: We’re not trying to diminish the role of the plaza here. All we’re saying here is here’s another opportunity. The plaza should shine as much as it could shine.

Unidentified Audience Member: I didn’t see up there in your plans – I saw all the other ones. But the initial planning of the City of LA was the Plaza. It is the starting point and ending point. Thank you.

Aaron Paley: Thank you. I think I’m going to end with Marty. Please be succinct so we can move forward. Thank you.

Mark Williams: I’ll be succinct. My name is Mark Williams. I’m a concerned citizen from South Central Los Angeles. Kids 15 minutes away don’t have a safe place in the streets to play. Can we really afford to spend even $50 million on a park here for wealthy people? And what’s being described here is more of a venue than a public park, if we’re honest with ourselves. Can we do that? Is this the wisest use of $50 million? And is it true that the County evaluated the land lease, and said that it could have been restructured so that it would be $500 million over 99 years as opposed to $50 million? That being the case, who is really going to pay for this?

Aaron Paley: Okay, so we have two things on the table, does anyone want to answer the $500 million, $50 million, the net present value versus – you’re saying that that’s…

Bill Witte: The “How the $50 million will be used by the Joint Powers Authority and the County Board of Supervisors” question. And, no, the second statement is not correct, that it was valued
at $500 million.

Aaron Paley: As members of the design team, we've been given this charge, figuring out the best way to spend this money. If you want to make change on that level, I think you need to go back to the people who made the policy, and said "$50 million is going to this park," in other words, the City and the County authorities.

Marty Kaplan: Some online questions, "How will we deal with the loss of the big parking lot in front of City Hall?"

Aaron Paley: We're going to have parking right under this building, it's going to be retrofitted with enough parking to replace that parking.

Marty Kaplan: "Will there be private donors for the park?"

Aaron Paley: We would love it! Come forward and send in your cash!

Marty Kaplan: And – I didn't write this – "What guarantee will there be that public input will be taken seriously?"

Aaron Paley: We're taking this very seriously for all Angelenos. We live here, we're going to live here for the rest of our lives, and we want to show our face in public. We want to be proud of this park, just as much as you.

Brenda Levin: We've all been working downtown and in the Los Angeles region for over, collectively, probably 75 years, 25 years each, and so we have a long history of commitment to Los Angeles.
Lois Hampton: Hi. My name is Lois Hampton, and I’m nearly a 50-year resident of Los Angeles, and a regular person downtown for the past 30 years or so. I have three issues. One is unfortunately I did not attend the workshop, but I noticed…

Aaron Paley: Please ask a question, so we can move forward.

Lois Hampton: I didn’t see anything on the list over there that addressed issues of sustainable development.

Aaron Paley: Sustainable development.

Lois Hampton: What is the commitment there? Number two, what is the commitment to sharing streets equally with pedestrians and bicyclists?

Aaron Paley: Yes.

Lois Hampton: So that means cars get much less space, if at all.

[Applause]

Lois Hampton: Are there any plans to make the Grand Street Promenade car-free as in, for example, the great streets of Barcelona?

Aaron Paley: Number three?

Lois Hampton: Number three, I’ve heard someone just address issues of parking, and I’m wondering why we would even consider making one more parking space in downtown Los Angeles?
Aaron Paley: Okay. Sustainability?

Mark Rios: Sustainability is essential to the civic park. You will see where we’ve been talking about it.

Aaron Paley: Second, sharing the streets?

Brenda Levin: Well, we’ve talked a lot about connecting to the streets. Obviously, pedestrian movement and pedestrian flow is key to getting people to the park, and to having them understand that they’re moving through a district that includes the park. So we’ll be looking at ways to do that.

Aaron Paley: And right now, we are not calling for any additional parking. We’re just calling for replacing existing parking that’s here already, as we’re required to. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

So, this is how it’s going to work: there’s still coffee, there’s still cookies, and there’s still tamales. We have 10 tables out there, 10 round tables. Go to a table, and we’re going to start this process.

Mark Rios: And from our staff at CAR and Rios Clementi Hale, the staff at Levin & Associates staff, the board, the Related Companies, we thank you so much.