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LOCAL LINKS**UCD students dream of Sacramento green**

By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer

SACRAMENTO -- From offices on the 11th floor of the Wells Fargo Building downtown, Professor Mark Francis gestured out the window.

"You can see it from here," he said, pointing north.

"It" in his mind eye is a fabulous new urban park larger than Central Park in New York City. It is about 200 times larger than Central Park in Davis -- which Francis helped design.

Gold Rush Park is still only a dream, but in the minds of 18 community design students, it is fast taking shape. Francis came to attorney Joe Genshlea's office last week to show him five visions for the new park.

The students showed their designs to the Gold Rush Park Foundation board, a group of community leaders who are trying to make the approximately 1,000-acre park a reality.

"I told my students that this is one of the largest and most important projects they will ever work on in their careers," Francis said before his students took the floor. "It doesn't get any better than this."

Reusing marginal land

The area Francis pointed toward from the high-rise window is north of downtown, a swath of land south of the American River and east of the Sacramento River -- land marked by abandoned railroad yards, nearly deserted factories and warehouses, and the old city dump. It's an area of neglect and misuse, 35 times larger than Old Sacramento, but it nonetheless carries an appraised value of \$425 million.

Genshlea says \$425 million is a doable number. And the park, he said, is to be developed at no cost to taxpayers.

Therefore, the park can't be 100 percent green space, he added.

"We need to have a portion for development of one kind or another," Genshlea said.

The idea, in part, would be to build commercial and high-density residential neighborhoods along the park edges. That would help pay for the planned development of the rest of the park.

Others say it may not be necessary to adhere to pay-as-you-go developments if the edge of the park is allowed to flow irregularly and come into an expanded downtown -- which is how city of Austin, Texas, has designed its major park.

The students' designs imagine a Gold Rush Park that would be home to cultural buildings like museums, science centers and arts centers. Each group also included generous acreage for the creation of a new Sacramento Zoo designed to eclipse San Diego's famous zoo.

"The creation of this new park gives Sacramento the opportunity to go from a pass-through place to a go-to place," Francis said. His students were given 10 weeks to create "a new green heart for the community and region" -- an assignment that would take a professional designer 10 months or more.

"Their job is to present a vision to you to give you a way to think," Francis told the audience.

Chris Chisam was the spokesman for the first group of students to take

Weather
Poll

ads here



the floor.

Use the rivers

"We want to make people want to come here and use the rivers," Chisam said. His plan would divert the American River toward the city with fingers of water to create a 1,200-acre space that could be used as cultural and recreational center for the entire region.

Earlier, Francis commented on how strange it is that Sacramento's entrance is the Sacramento River -- an area that is hard to see or appreciate and difficult to access.

With the creation of Gold Rush Park, Sacramento would have a new face and a new gathering place for up to a million people who might like to gather for a free concert or some other event.

In the Chisam plan, a large central park area would give way to a beach on the American River. An interpark transit system would move people from one area to another. There would be plenty of active and passive activities, including a 110-acre zoo, six miles of bike paths, public buildings such as museums, a riparian reserve, a high-density hotel district on the bend in the rivers where the American and Sacramento meet, and even a natural campground on the eastern edge of the park.

Gold Rush Park would reclaim the industrial tract known as the Richards Boulevard corridor. The area would take advantage of Old Sacramento and the American River Parkway. The park would connect downtown Sacramento and West Sacramento to Cal Expo and Sacramento State, in a cultural and recreational corridor. It would encourage the riverfront development, helping to revitalize West Sacramento and East Yolo.

In Chisam's plan, 146 acres would be devoted to new residential development while 249 acres would become a business district.

"That would be a huge help in buying the land," he said.

High-rise hotel area

Other students showed their designs, which incorporated many of the major ideas and added some twists. Students all liked the high-rise hotel area on the river's bend and the idea of a large zoo. Some designs left more land for native wildlife while others emphasized sports parks. Students wanted to see performing arts centers, permanent farmers' markets and water taxi services.

"We want a park reflecting the history of Sacramento and the future," student Justine Smith said. Her scheme emphasized leaving a large portion of the land undeveloped. An arboretum would run the length of the park along the American River.

"(The park) would provide sanctuary for locals and connect downtown with green space," she said.

"Open space would be the gift of this new development," Smith said.

The board reacted enthusiastically to the students' design proposals.

"The ideas are great," Genshlea said. "Just wonderful."

The Gold Rush Park Foundation has hired the former parks director of Indianapolis to run an eight-month process to build community support for the project.

During this time, Francis and his students will make presentations of the design alternatives.

Central Park in Davis

Francis was instrumental in the redesign of Davis' Central Park. That project began in the same urban and community design studio class,

which he taught in 1983.

"We were the first to put the (redesign) idea forward and Save Open Space did the hard work to get voters' support for the project," he said. "I was hired to design the expanded park in 1986 with my firm CoDesign/MIG and the rest is history."

Francis says it appears that Central Park is now too small for many of the activities that take place.

"When we first advanced the idea of an expanded park, Davis had about 40,000 people," he said. "I think in some ways that the park is now too popular and too small for the diverse activities that take place there," he added.

"Because of this, I have been encouraging the Gold Rush Park board to go for as large a park as possible," Francis said.

For more information, go to www.goldrushpark.org.

-- Reach Elisabeth Sherwin at gizmo@dcn.org

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