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A Park for Downtown Los Angeles
Larry Mantle, host
Jan Perry, LA Councilwoman 9th district
Martin Kaplan, USC
Bob Sipchen, LA Times

Total running time of show is 20 minutes. This transcript starts at 11min 15sec. Listen to the audio.

LM: We’re talking with Marty Kaplan, director of the Norman Lear Center at USC’s Annenberg School for Communication – Jan Perry, Los Angeles City Councilwoman joining us as well on Airtalk. So, as the decisions are going to be made about what this design looks like, will it come back before the public then?

JP: Yes, let me correct a few things. First of all, no decisions have been made other than a conceptual plan and it’s merely a plan. It’s in a state of flux, to have four – I guess you call them – rooms – in the park, and it’s a linear park as you know, with a grand terrace, and a great lawn, and a civic plaza, and they haven’t really given a term to the area where the court flags is but it’s a long rectangular park and it has a topography that goes downhill depending on if you’re coming from the music center down to city hall. So it presents a very interesting opportunity to create different spaces for different opportunities or different experiences. There hasn’t yet been anything allocated or designated for programming, it’s all conceptual at this point. One of the things we will probably be able to do once we have arrived at a final
understanding with the developers – because we’re not there yet – is to have a city-wide opportunity to participate and comment and bring ideas. Maybe it will take the form of a charette – haven’t quite decided on that yet and I have to talk to my other board members about how to set that up. But some way for the public to participate in the design and planning process.

BS: Councilwoman – it’s interesting – one of the things I find interesting about the process (this is Bob Sipchen) is that I do hear people, maybe it was a slip, but you did say that there was a great lawn as part of the project now and I think what’s interesting is that some of the pieces do seem to be fitting into place already for the official developers and I think that one of the things that Marty is trying to do is to slow down that process.

JP: Well, I wouldn’t construe my use of those terms as something that is a set in stone agreement with the developers. I think it’s just a way to talk to people and if you have seen their presentations, they just try and block things out that way. But again, ultimately, we don’t have a plan in place yet, only concepts, and if you were-you know – I think one of you commented that you were able to go to one of our outreach sessions. I think if you saw those sessions you could see that they were trying to organize very broad very far-reaching disparate information and input that people brought and at least try and categorize it in some way.

MK: Councilwoman this is Marty Kaplan. If you can get a charette, I would be the first to come and applaud and send
bouquets. A design charrette for people who don’t know is an intensive opportunity for people to actually come up with proposals quite concretely. And it mobilizes lots of people, sometimes in lots of places, over an intense period of time in order to see what’s really there. That’s exactly the kind of leadership which I think this project needs.

LM: And do you think, Councilwoman Perry, that that is highly possible that such a process will take place?

JP: Absolutely. It’s absolutely possible to do that. Again, and I just want to make this clear, we have to reach a final understanding with the developer, you know, you have to have a deal in place that is final and fully executed and then I think we can move ahead on broadening the process so that I think that this can not only be probably a once in a lifetime experience for many of us - to be able to give birth to what could become a citywide iconic open space that will mean a lot of different things to all sorts of people.

LM: We’re talking with Councilwoman Jan Perry of Downtown Los Angeles’ 9th district which she represents. She is also on this Grand Avenue project joint power authority that is looking at how best to create a sense, a place, a gathering spot, some kind of retreat in the heart of downtown Los Angeles and a space that would connect up the music center and LA City Hall with new construction that would be on the perimeter of this open space. Martin Kaplan of USC’s Norman Lear Center that he directs is with us and Bob Sipchen who’s an editor of the Current section of the Los Angeles Times, he’s heading up this project of asking Times readers
to provide input on how best to create this kind of public space in downtown LA. We had a listener who called in and wanted to ask about parking. And I’m just wondering Councilwoman Perry, there is a parking lot right under this property.

JP: Right under there, owned by the county. And then of course across the street is Disney Hall but the county of Los Angeles parks directly underneath there.

LM: All right, very good. So also we had a listener, Todd in Pasadena, wondering about sustainability. Might there be some demonstration acts/aspects to this so that it would be - perhaps have a lower environmental impact?

JP: Well, I think we’re all very conscious of the fact that we need to be sustainable and that whatever we construct and however it ends up that it needs to abide by certain lead standards - I’m not sure how high we can get - of course in an ideal world I’d love to get the platinum - but to be able to build a park that uses recycled water and plants that are self-propagating that can replenish themselves, those sorts of things, solar power, whatever we can do to make it sustainable is something that I think all of us are very very very conscious of and would welcome that.

MK: Larry, if I could echo that. One of the submissions, which can be found online at GrandIntervention.org, came from a class at USC who proposed a Green park - meaning not just that it was full of living things, rather, a kind of demonstration project about sustainability that the entire park be built around the educational principal of
stewardship for the environment with a special focus on water. After all, the DWP is at the top of the hill and water is at the basis of LA’s existence.

JP: Well, don’t forget the birthplace of the city of Los Angeles, El Pueblo, is just up the street.

MK: Exactly.

JP: And the Zanja Madre is the original water system that carried water throughout our entire city and so to be able to recognize the historical aspect of that and to interpret that in some way, that’s not only environmentally conscious but can be a teaching tool and be beautiful is something we would all support. I just want to make one last point particularly I think when we all do our outreach, the ideas that come from younger people are quite exceptional and give them an opportunity to be able to put their dreams to paper and as we try to struggle to improve the quality of education here in our own city, this is another opportunity to teach.

MK: Yes and we had dozens of outreach sessions at local schools and we put up a booth at the Grand Avenue Festival where families could come and draw or construct models of what they thought the park should look like.

LM: All right. And Bob Sipchen of the LA Time, what’s coming next from your publication on this?

BS: Well, I’m not sure.
LM: Are you done with this project?

BS: We may try and turn this over to another part of the paper; we may do more on the web or the Current section. I just left the Current section as editor but they may want to do something again down the line as this progresses and new ideas come in. I also suspect that at some point our editorial board will editorialize officially about the park and what should happen to it.

LM: {ENDS THE PROGRAM AND THANKS THE GUESTS}