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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

**PRESENTATION BY
Ms. Martha Welborne
Managing Director
Grand Avenue Committee**

Topic: The Future of Grand Avenue

December 4, 2003

Chairman Philibosian introduced Ms. Welborne and welcomed her to the Commission.

What is the Grand Avenue Committee?

Ms. Welborne began by stating that she has worked on the Grand Avenue Project for the past three years. Some 3 ½ - 4 years ago, then Mayor Richard Riordan and Mr. Eli Broad realized that with the opening of the new Cathedral, and with the resumption of the Disney Concert Hall Project, the remainder of Grand Avenue would require attention. They approached Mr. James Thomas, who was then heading the Facilities Committee of the Music Center to “extend his reach” as far as 5th Street. Mr. Thomas and Mr. Broad have subsequently lent a great deal of their time and expertise to the Committee and to the accomplishment of its goals.

The Committee is composed of the following:

- Honorable Gloria Molina, Los Angeles County Supervisor (Chair)
- Honorable Jan Perry, Los Angeles City Councilmember
- David Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer of Los Angeles County
- Mr. Robert Ovrom, Chief Executive Officer of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)
- Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles
- State of California Representative to be appointed by the Governor (Ex Officio)

The Committee works with Ms. Welborne as the only staff member, using consulting firms to assist in the work. This precludes the necessity of hiring a large staff.

The Committee’s primary focus is to create a gathering place in downtown Los Angeles, where people sense that they are in the heart of the City. While the Grand Avenue location has always made sense, the impetus of the recently completed projects including: the Disney Concert Hall, the Los Angeles Cathedral, the

Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) - Los Angeles, the Colburn School of Arts, the renovation of City Hall, the plans for the new CalTrans building, and the possibility of the new federal courthouse have lent considerable momentum to the Grand Avenue Project.

What is the Scope of the Grand Avenue Project?

The Project takes into account the large number of governmental uses situated in close proximity to the Civic Center (one estimate places the Los Angeles Civic Center area second only to the Pentagon for government workers in one locale). This concentration makes the project area an even more the logical site for development.

Currently, downtown Los Angeles suffers from a lack of open space in which to gather - currently gatherings of large numbers of people are held in the streets, or even in parking lots. Moreover, with the recent additions of cultural and civic attractions downtown, as well as the explosive growth of downtown housing (in excess of 9,000 units), the time is right for a reexamination and revitalization of adjacent spaces, especially Grand Avenue.

The Committee has focused their planning efforts in three major areas: the Park, the Avenue, and four specific development sites (designated Parcels L, M, Q & W).

- **Park:** Most of the park area currently exists, extending from the east side of the Department of Water and Power (DWP) building to City Hall. There is a parking lot adjacent to City Hall which could be relocated underground, allowing the park to extend without major interruption between these two buildings. Moreover, the Committee hopes that their efforts will result in increased public awareness of both the existence and the available uses of the park area. Possibilities include carefully controlled vendors, natural built-in performance environments and an open vista extending through the park. There is no intent to close the streets, but rather to delineate pedestrian crossing zones in the streets that will be running through the park.
- **The Street:** The goal here is to create a superior pedestrian space, as well as a promenade. The area slated for development starts at Cesar Chavez Boulevard. A new arts magnet high school that is being designed at this location will provide an upbeat energy to the entire area. Traveling down the avenue, there is the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, the Music Center, Disney Hall and MOCA. Additionally, the Colburn School has just received accreditation to offer a baccalaureate degree, and will be building out to accommodate new uses accordingly. There is also the REDCAT Theater in the Disney Center where undergraduate students from CalArts perform. This Project will be anchored on its southern end by the Los Angeles Central Library. Also proximal will be the new CalTrans building and the new federal courthouse.

One issue that the Committee is confronting is the narrow pedestrian walkways along Grand Avenue, specifically, the stretch near MOCA and the Colburn School. One notion is to pave over or cover the central vent between the opposing traffic lanes that currently exists along this portion of the avenue. This would allow for additional traffic lanes in the middle of the street and enable the pedestrian walkways to be widened. From Temple Street to 2nd Avenue, the trees and other vegetation are being changed to better reflect not only the local architecture, but also more effectively provide for the needs of pedestrians.

- **Specific Development Sites:** There are four parcels, two owned by the CRA, and two by Los Angeles County. The agreement that the Committee is operating under now allows it to conceive and propose possible uses for these spaces in a unified and coherent manner. These parcels are all zoned and entitled, so regulatory review should be minimal. Two of the parcels are zoned for residential, which the Committee agrees with, while the other two are zoned for mixed-use, possibly including office, hotel, residential, and entertainment/retail. One of the parcels is entitled to 1.7 million sq. ft. - so the potential for social and economic impact is significant.

How will the plans of the committee be accomplished?

Once the Committee had completed its concept analysis to identify opportunities, the Committee then endeavored to form a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to effectuate their plans. Having overcome many obstacles, the Committee continues to seek funding for the various projects. While the total development cost has been estimated at \$1.2 billion, the largest part of these costs would be borne by the private developers of the parcels. Other monies for the improvement to the park might be generated by public/private partnerships, where private entities (corporate sponsors, individuals, non-profits, etc.) each fund a "piece" of the Park improvements. For example, a company might offer to sponsor an outdoor walkway, fountain or amphitheater. The collection of individually sponsored projects, in collaboration with local monies might be one way to fund the project with respect to the Park area.

What is the Status of the Project currently?

The Committee has engaged in the traditional Request For Qualifications (RFQ) process, wherein the qualifications of prospective companies are ascertained and reviewed. This process is followed by a selection of those companies that merit participation in the Request For Proposal (RFP) process. A company or consortium of companies will be selected from the RFP process. The Committee's recent RFQ garnered seven timely submissions, which are being reviewed, with a short-list to be recommended to the JPA at their January meeting. The JPA will then make their decision regarding those firms/consortiums that will receive the RFP. The JPA expects to make a decision on the Project at some point this spring.

Commissioner Questions

Commissioner Thierer expressed concern over the existence of a traffic management plan. Ms. Welborne responded that traffic management is definitely something that the Committee is concerned about. The Committee is in the process of determining whether to hire an outside consultant to assist with this planning, or to leave it to the appropriate local governments. Ms. Welborne noted that there is work being done on removing the one-way streets from downtown. In the wake of such a move, a coherent and viable traffic management plan is vital.

Commissioner Selditz asked where the monies for the existing improvements had come from. Ms. Welborne responded that it was put together from various state funds and other sources. Commissioner Hill noted that the water attractions were a big draw for families, and might be considered in the plans for the development area.

Commissioner Anderson inquired as to the status of parking management plans. Ms. Welborne responded that this was somewhat tied to the question of traffic management, but that each building project would be governed, in part, by the applicable zoning requirements for each parcel - however, Ms. Welborne indicated the possibilities of joint parking construction efforts.

Commissioner Ikejiri questioned the attraction for families to come to the park space proposed by the Committee. Ms. Welborne responded that the Committee was considering having a separate agency operate the park. This would encourage special events programming along with adequate security and other necessary arrangements, similar to those in Central Park in New York or the programming at California Plaza.

Upon the completion of her presentation, Chairman Philibosian thanked Ms. Welborne for making time for the Commission in her schedule and for making such an enlightening and instructive presentation.

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