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SAN DIEGO

## City and county leaders break ground on Civic Park at Grand Avenue project

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City and county leaders held a groundbreaking ceremony Thursday morning for the first piece of

the multibillion-dollar Grand Avenue project – a lush new urban park that will stretch from the Music Center to City Hall.

Crews have already begun construction on the 16-acre, four-block Civic Park, which will include a dog run, several plazas and a performance lawn and stage. At the ceremony Thursday, Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina praised the project as "a much-needed oasis."

"We're trying to create a park for everyone," Molina said. "It will be an inviting place to come, eat lunch, and bask in the California sun."

That sun, she noted to laughter, was "maybe a little much" on Thursday. By 10 a.m., the thermometer had already crept past 80 degrees, causing balloons to burst in the heat and a quartet of jazz musicians to mop their brows between songs. Aides hurriedly handed out bottles of water to politicians.

The design firm in charge of the project, Rios Clementi Hale Studios, displayed an architectural model of what the park will look like, as well as pictures of the 140 different species of plants that will make up the gardens. The vegetation – including English lavender, California lilac and African tulips – looks to be heavy on pinks and purples.

Perhaps the best part of the park, city officials said on Thursday, is that it is already paid for.

In 2007, the developer of the Grand Avenue mixed-used project, Related Companies, paid the city and county \$50 million for the park as a prepayment of rent anticipated from the project's first phase. With interest, that fund has grown to nearly \$56 million.

The economic slowdown has stalled the rest of the development, which calls for high-rise condos and retail outlets on mostly vacant lots on Bunker Hill. At the groundbreaking, city officials acknowledged the hurdles facing the rest of the development.

"The recession has put the community development project in a holding pattern," Molina said. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa called the development process "a rocky road."

In a speech, Villaraigosa praised Eli Broad, the billionaire philanthropist who once chaired the Grand Avenue Committee that has played a key role in planning the mixed-use project.

"What is Los Angeles, when they write the chronicles of L.A., without Eli Broad?" Villaraigosa asked before Broad stepped up to the podium.

Earlier this week Broad told city and county officials that he is willing to pay \$7.7 million for a 99-year lease on a plot of city-owned land nearby the new Civic Park site to build a museum to house his vast collection of contemporary art. He has said that his museum would play a big role in revitalizing the Grand Avenue corridor.

The park, he said, would also help.

"We have a long way to go before realizing the vision of Grand Avenue, but today is an important first step," he said. "Stay tuned."