

'URBAN OASIS'

Construction starts on \$56M park in downtown Los Angeles

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Posted: 07/15/2010

Updated: 07/16/2010



People crowd around a model of the new park. Officials of the County and City of Los Angeles turned off the fountain during a groundbreaking, of sorts, for the Civic Park in a 12 acre, four block park located between City Hall and the Music Center in Los Angeles. | [See photo gallery](#) . (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)

A decade after he conceived the plan, billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad joined civic and business leaders Thursday at the groundbreaking for a 12-acre Civic Park, an "urban oasis" expected to boost the rebirth of downtown.

The \$56 million park is part of the \$3billion Grand Avenue project that seeks to transform downtown into a vibrant regional center with two Frank Gehry-designed skyscrapers next to the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

"This lush, green park promises to be an urban oasis where people can picnic, walk around at lunchtime, bring their families and congregate for special events like concerts and celebrations such as New Year's Eve, Cinco de Mayo, July Fourth and more," Broad said.

The Grand Avenue project, which officials said has been delayed by the recession, will include restaurants, stores, a hotel and up to 2,600 apartments and condominiums.

To mark the start of park construction, officials turned off the historic Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain. It will be turned on again when the project is completed in summer 2012.

Thursday's event also included yoga on the lawn, music, art, storytelling and education on drought-tolerant plants to highlight the many ways the park could be used by downtown government workers, jurors, residents and others.

The park will connect the Music Center and City Hall and be bordered by the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration and Stanley Mosk Courthouse.

Most of the park's funding comes from \$50million in pre-paid rent for ground leases from The Related Cos., which is developing the Grand Avenue project.

The park will feature a large lawn in front of City Hall for performances and festivals. It will also include smaller lawns, gardens and tree groves and a dog run.

Inspired by a flattened map of the globe from the 1920s by J. Paul Goode, the first American cartographer, the park will feature a three-quarter-mile promenade loop and smaller walking paths meandering through various gardens, said park lead designer Mark W. Rios.

"We are renovating, of course, our historic fountain ... to bring it back to the kind of original elegance it had before, but we are also enhancing it so it will invite children to be able to run through a very shallow water basin so they can have fun here," said county Supervisor Gloria Molina.

New pedestrian-friendly steps and handicapped-accessible ramps will create a series of terraces leading down into the park from Grand Avenue and the Music Center where people will be able to see the park and view the fountain that will spray water 50 feet into the air.

The view is currently blocked by landscaping and Grand Avenue parking ramps that go into underground parking lots that contain 1,920 spaces, a portion of which may be available for use by park visitors in the evenings and on weekends after the park opens.

"This is the beginning of something new for the city of Los Angeles," Councilwoman Jan Perry said. "Finally we'll have something that merits the City of Angels."