



## State park looks to grow

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### Old Town pursuing former Caltrans site

**By Jeff Ristine**  
STAFF WRITER

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Old Town San Diego State Historic Park would acquire the 2½-acre site of Caltrans' former district headquarters, then excavate and reconstruct historic structures buried underneath it, under a plan being worked out between the two state agencies.

The rare chance to expand the boundaries of the urban park, which historians regard as one of the most important sites in the development of the West Coast, was hailed by San Diego officials and preservationists.

Ultimately, the state park hopes to re-create the look along the banks of the San Diego River, which once ran through the site, as it existed for prehistoric cultures.

The annexation proposal is “an opportunity that we cannot lose,” said state Sen. Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego.

Kehoe yesterday announced the plan in a news conference in a parking lot near the former District 11 headquarters for the California Department of Transportation, which is adjacent to the state park. Caltrans began moving across the street to a new, \$70 million building in April.

Historians say the remnants of adobe structures lie beneath the Caltrans building and a state park parking lot to the west.

The hope is that the building can be razed, so the structures can be unearthed and used to illustrate the history of San Diego.

“We're actually standing on a riverbank,” Bruce Coons, executive director of Save Our Heritage Organisation, said at the news conference. “This is the reason San Diego is where it is.”



SOURCE: SanGIS

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**Caltrans' former district headquarters could be added to the Old Town State Historic Park.**

Ronie Clark, state parks district superintendent, said preliminary plans call for archaeological excavations at the Caltrans site and the parking lot to the west, just behind a structure called the McCoy House. The historic buildings would be reconstructed, she said.

“I’d like to build a brand new entrance to Old Town State Park on this site,” Clark added, which would cut off Calhoun Street at about the middle.

The four employees still working in the decrepit, two-story Caltrans building are due to leave by the end of next week. Opened in 1952, the building is considered seismically unsafe in even a moderate earthquake. But the property has been appraised at around \$13.6 million.

Details of the transfer are being worked out. Caltrans was required to offer the property to another state agency before putting it up for public sale, where proceeds would go to the state general fund.

The deal in the works would not involve a major cash transfer. Kehoe said the state would give Caltrans “credits” equal to the value of the property, which would count toward mitigation – such as preserving wetlands – required for future road projects. The district would be able to draw from this mitigation bank until all the credits were used.

Clark said negotiations are in the early stages. It would be difficult for the parks department to pay the full value for the land, she said, hence the focus on mitigation credits. The possibility of a token payment of \$1 for the land has not been ruled out, Clark said.

Kehoe said the deal requires only the approval of the state administration, which controls Caltrans and the park.

Pedro Orso-Delgado, chief of Caltrans District 11, predicted the completion of negotiations in two months.

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