



Everything New Orleans

Lafitte Corridor property purchased by city

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Danny Monteverde, The Times-Picayune



Eliot Kamenitz, The Times-Picayune archive

The Lafitte Greenway site was photographed in September.

New Orleans Mayor **Mitch Landrieu** said Wednesday the city has repurchased a 17-acre plot of land along the Lafitte Corridor, bringing the idea for a proposed linear park one step closer to reality.

The city hopes to transform the swath of abandoned railroad tracks into a 3-mile-long park that would connect Armstrong Park on the edge of the French Quarter to Canal Boulevard where Lakeview meets Mid-City.

"This is an important step toward the realization of the Lafitte Greenway project," Landrieu said. "We're taking an abandoned railroad corridor and creating green space that our entire community can enjoy."

The city bought the last remaining parcels -- **bordered by North Dorgenois, St. Louis and Lafitte streets and North Claiborne Avenue** -- from the Trust for Public Land, a national conservation organization, for \$3.8 million in Community Development Block Grant money.

The site is the former home of the Louisiana Institute of Film Technology studio, a film production company that went bankrupt. The Trust for Public Land bought the land late last year from a mortgage holder that won the property at auction after LIFT collapsed under a federal investigation.

In April 2009, LIFT director Malcolm Petal was sentenced to five years in federal prison for conspiring to bribe a former state official in exchange for Louisiana film-industry tax credits.

While the city again owns the land that it sold to LIFT in 2006, plans to develop it into a pedestrian-friendly park have not been finalized.

The city has set aside \$7.6 million of CDBG money for planning and developing the park but has not decided who will get the contract, said Ryan Berni, a mayoral spokesman. He said the city hopes to make that decision in a few months.

A previous contract with a design firm under the Ray Nagin administration fell apart when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development began to look over all city projects using CDBG money.

While it wasn't clear whether there were problems with the Lafitte Greenway contract, Nagin terminated it and asked companies to submit new proposals, but he did not award a new contract before leaving office last month.

The Landrieu administration will subject those proposals to new contract rules, Berni said. A panel of Landrieu aides and other city employees will review the proposals and recommend a winner.

Deputy Mayor Cedric Grant will oversee the project.

While the corridor in the most recent past saw railcars rumble through it, it was originally part of the **Carondelet Canal**, dug in the late 1700s to ship goods to the French Quarter. A turning basin at the end of the canal gave Basin Street its name.

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