

Disneyland cancels parking expansion on eastern side of park, focuses on new hotel and parking on west side



A rendering of Disney's new four diamond hotel coming to the west side of Downtown Disney in 2021. (Courtesy: Disneyland Resort)

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Disneyland officials said the much-hyped Disneyland Eastern Gateway Project is dead — for now — and the new focus is on developing a new 4-diamond hotel and parking structure on the west side of the resort, which could open near the debut of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge in 2019.

After a year, Walt Disney Co. officials decided to pivot away from that project and began notifying city of Anaheim staff on Tuesday, Oct. 24, of new plans to build a new, 6-story, 6,500-spot parking structure on the Pinocchio Lot. The new lot would be next to its 10,000-spot Mickey and Friends parking structure and a yet-to-be-themed 700-room 4-diamond hotel in Downtown Disney.

Disney also said it would build a new hotel parking structure next to the Paradise Pier Hotel to accommodate future guests.

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“This is one of the largest infrastructure projects to take place in the resort in the last two decades,” said Suzi Brown, a Disneyland spokeswoman. “It will significantly improve circulation today and lay the foundation for future growth throughout the resort area.”

Disney’s recent announcement comes as it continues to build out [Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge](#), its largest-ever, single-themed land expansion at Disneyland, and more than a year after touting the [Disneyland Eastern Gateway Project](#), a massive development on the east side of the Disneyland Resort, to help prepare for the boost in attendance expected when the new land opens.

The Eastern Gateway Project, planned for the east side of Harbor Boulevard, included a seven-story, 6,900-spot parking structure, a new transportation hub with security screening and a pedestrian bridge over Harbor Boulevard. The bridge, on the site of the former Carousel Inn hotel, would have helped bring in guests onto the esplanade area of Disneyland and Disney California Adventure near the ticket booths.

Along with the development of Star Wars land, the Eastern Gateway project was part of a [\\$1 billion-plus investment deal Disney struck with Anaheim in 2015](#) in exchange for the city to not impose an entertainment tax for 30 to 45 years.

Gateway obstacles

But almost immediately after announcing the bold project, Disney faced several hurdles. [The neighboring businesses — the motels, hotels, and restaurants — along Harbor Boulevard protested](#), fearing that they'd lose [foot traffic and see a decline in business](#). The City Council then dismantled the city's planning commission and later reassembled it. And there was a belief among experts that follow the city's relationship with Disneyland that the City Council majority would not allow Disney to build a pedestrian bridge over Harbor Boulevard.

Unlike the Eastern Gateway Project, Disney's plan on the west side of the resort needs minimal city involvement.

Disneyland already has entitlements to build up to 16,700 parking spots in and around the Mickey & Friends parking structure, according to city staff. In 2016, the [city gave Disney and real estate developer Wincome Group the approval to build three luxury four-diamond hotels](#) (one from Disney and two for Wincome) in exchange for 70 percent of the 15 percent transient occupancy tax visitors are charged to stay at the new hotels for 20 years. Wincome already broke ground on one of its 4-diamond, a Westin hotel, next to the Convention Center in September. Another Wincome project is slated on the site of the Anaheim Hotel on Harbor Boulevard.

Disney just needs to turn in the hotel's site plan to the planning commission for approval.

Disney officials said they have no plans to develop the Eastern Gateway and will keep the land vacant. The Carousel Inn, which [they purchased for \\$32 million in 2015](#), will be razed in the coming months. There's a possibility Disney will revisit developing in the future.

A city spokesman said the new parking structure is expected to fall under the 2015 entertainment tax policy that increases attendance at the theme parks or result in longer stays in Anaheim.

More parking and lodging

Similar to Mickey & Friends, the parking structure on the Pinocchio surface lot will be six levels and have escalators and elevators that lead guests toward a revamped tram loading area that takes them to Downtown Disney and the two theme parks. To clear up the daily congestion that happens along Ball Road, once visitors enter the fly by ramp, Disney will add six additional lanes to its current 10 lanes to help flow cars quicker into either parking lot.

Construction for the parking structure, dubbed by a Disney official as "Mickey & Friend's little brother" would start in the first quarter of 2018 with a completion date of 2019, possibly after Star Wars land opens.

Meanwhile, the new hotel — yet to be named — is the first Disney has built in Anaheim in 20 years and will adhere to AAA's strict four-diamond guideline. Disney officials described it as a "contemporary style" hotel, a "resort oasis" that will take up 17-acres on the west side of Downtown Disney, where ESPN Zone, the AMC theaters, Earl of Sandwich, Starbucks and Rainforest Cafe currently sit. Disneyland officials said they are beginning to inform the affected tenants of the resort's plans and there's a possibility some of them may operate inside of the hotel.

Disney also plans to build a platform connecting the Disneyland Monorail system inside the new hotel. The monorail will not be re-routed, as formerly planned with the Eastern Gateway project, nor will the Grand Californian have a dedicated stop.

Disney officials said [the 700-room hotel](#) will feature two pools, concierge service, a kid's play area, and an upscale rooftop restaurant where visitors would be able to watch Disneyland's nightly fireworks. Lush trees and water elements will dot the landscape along with walkways that connect Disney's four hotel properties. The new hotel will be Disney's third four-diamond luxury resort, joining the Disneyland Hotel and Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa. Disney's Paradise Pier Hotel is considered a three-diamond property. The new hotel parking structure is expected to serve 2,000 or more cars.

Hotel construction would start in 2018, with a scheduled completion in 2021.

"This one will be a game changer, creating a dynamic dining, entertainment and hotel experience that will attract new hotel guests and allow the city to compete with other Southern California four-diamond hotels," Brown said.

With all of the moving parts, Downtown Disney visitors in the future will have a dedicated parking lot on the Simba lot on Katella Avenue and Disneyland Drive. Disney said they plan to build a gateway for visitors to enter Downtown Disney.

Brown said the new hotel and other developments are part of Disney's \$2 billion investment in Anaheim. She said along with jobs, the hotel once built will generate \$25 million in hotel bed taxes directly to the city's general fund in the first five years.

City reactions

Councilwoman Kris Murray called Disney's announcement "extraordinary." She said Disneyland's new parking structure will bring in more people to Anaheim and the hotel will generate additional revenue to the city's general fund. Though the Eastern Gateway project couldn't move forward, she said Disney's alternative plan is "the best case scenario."

"Our residents are going to benefit," Murray said. "Not only will this development create more construction jobs for unions and other permanent jobs at the new hotel, but the additional revenue from the hotel and new restaurants will help fund the city for decades."

Robert "Red" Harbin, a spokesman for the Harbor Boulevard Merchants Coalition, a group created by some of the local business owners to protest the Eastern Gateway development, said his group is supportive of Disney's new plan. He said the businesses in the area have made a lot of improvements for visitors and he hopes Disney will revisit the Eastern Gateway and work with the merchants to come up with a solution that would be good for the area and the city.

"We're pleased with the development," Harbin said. "We want to reiterate that we did not want to kill the Eastern Gateway project. Our main intention was to work together with Disney and come up with a plan that would serve the best interest of Disney and the businesses here as a whole."

Disney's four-diamond hotel plan

Disneyland has scrapped its Eastern Gateway project and is now focusing on developing a new parking structure and four-diamond hotel on the west side of the Disneyland Resort.



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