

Canoe from Amazon to Fern Ridge?

By MELODY WARD
Of the Emerald

Backers devoted to waterway plan

To get to the University from Fern Ridge reservoir, just get on the Amazon corridor, take the Millrace exit off the Emerald canal and dock at the canoe shacks.

Those directions may seem impossible now, but a University architecture professor and his students have developed plans for a city canal system that could make canoe power a viable transportation alternative.

Novel transportation is only one aspect of the proposed waterways plan. Flood control, irrigation, pleasant urban housing and "nature in the city" are the benefits such a system could bring to Eugene according to Jerry Diethelm, landscape architecture department head.

"On one scale, it's efficient water management," he says. "On the other, it's an urban parks and recreation system."

The plan, which would join the now-stagnant Millrace to the Amazon by building the "Emerald" canal, has received enthusiastic nods from city and county officials, who have formed the Emerald Canal Steering Committee to further investigate its feasibility.

Diethelm started exploring the potential for a city-wide canal system after he returned from a European tour last fall. The project began to take shape in a fall term graduate design course.

"The most valuable design education is working on something important," he says. "It's gotten serious. The need for this kind of system really is part of a growing Eugene."

"The idea was to work on something I thought the city ought to study," he says. "At the same time, we wrote a National Endowment for the Arts grant."

Next month Diethelm will find out whether that grant will be approved. Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been awarded a \$60,000 grant to study the feasibility of the proposal.

That money will be used to establish a water budget for the canal, recalculate the urban storm runoff, study the authorization of Fern Ridge for recreation and support some of the planning

being done at the University, Diethelm says.

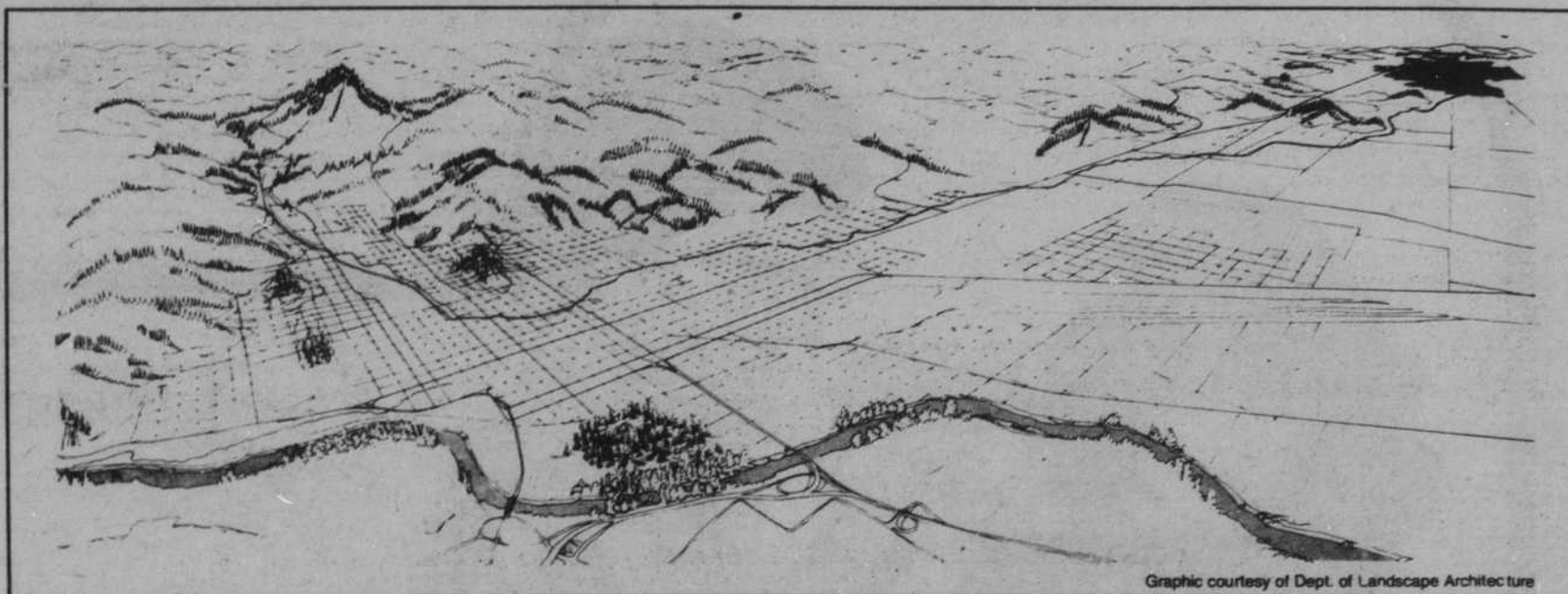
Students have contributed a lot to the plans, he adds. "They've

Flooding could again become a problem due to the rapid development of the south hills, Diethelm says.

three years, and the entire system could be complete within ten, he estimates.

The Amazon finds its source

lated from the Willamette through the Millrace, along the canal and the Amazon corridor to Fern Ridge. From Fern Ridge, the Long Tom River returns the water to the Willamette River, north of Monroe. The Emerald canal would make



Graphic courtesy of Dept. of Landscape Architecture

done a lot of studies, looked at alternatives, sketched ideas. This project has been a department effort. It's something that people get excited about."

Diethelm has presented the study to groups as diverse as downtown merchants, neighborhood groups and third graders.

Building the system would cost no more than the Civic Center bond — the student studies estimate from \$12 to 18 million — and Diethelm says it would directly benefit more people for hundreds of years.

Funding for the project could come from several sources, including state and federal aid, Diethelm says. Two Texas cities have established similar systems and are contributing information to the Emerald canal project.

"I think of it as a part of the city structure," he explains. "It's paying respect to our natural systems and taking advantage of them rather than covering them over."

"We must manage our whole water system better than we have."

The design would connect the Millrace, through the University area, to the Amazon Creek. The Amazon acts as the flood control channel for this end of the valley, which flooded regularly in the south Eugene area until the concrete channel was built in the 1940s.

"The Amazon corridor is no longer adequate. That's the key to re-design, only this time not in such an ugly way."

"We went down and looked at the Amazon Creek last fall after the first rains. It filled up really fast."

Though the system isn't dangerous now, Diethelm says it could be within five years. Work could start on the canal within

near Spencer's Butte and flows west, emptying into Fern Ridge. By ultimately connecting the Amazon to the Willamette, water would be recycled throughout the valley more efficiently, Diethelm says. That would mean more water in Fern Ridge for a greater part of the year, and a better habitat in the marshes for wildlife.

Ultimately, the system would allow water to be completely circu-

the inner city a more desirable place to live, Diethelm says. He envisions urban housing along the canal, and eventually hopes to see the entire Amazon corridor planned along the lines of Amazon park.

"There's no reason why it can't be like Amazon Park all along the waterway," he says. "It's just a matter of vision and commitment."

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