

After Baumgartner resigns Parks head takes over project

By MARV FJORDBECK
Of the Emerald

After 17 years of dealing in Eugene planning, Ed Smith figures he's ready to take on the project that was tagged "overly politicized" by its former director.

"I think the job will be a challenge," Smith says of his new position as director of the Eugene civic center project. "The important thing is that we have a quality end product, and I feel I can help give it."

Smith was named to the post Friday, after former director Dean Baumgartner resigned. Baumgartner cites professional concerns and personal frustrations with the project as reasons for stepping down.

The project had become overly politicized, Baumgartner says.

"When we arrive at conclusions, they should be arrived at for businesslike reasons, rather than political reasons," he says.

But Smith, who had served as Eugene Parks and Recreation Department head, disagrees with that assessment.

"I don't think it's overly politicized," he says. "This is a people-oriented community and people's involvement makes things happen."

"This is an important project, maybe a political decision has to be made to get things going."

"I've been assured by the city man-

ager (Charles Henry) that this will be my ball game and that the reason they put me in charge was to ramrod this project on and keep it on schedule," Smith says.

So far, the project, which will be financed by an \$18.5 million bond approved by voters last year, is "a week or two" behind schedule, Smith says.

But, preliminary designs for the project will be presented this week, and groundbreaking in downtown Eugene is still set for June 1.

Smith says he isn't sure what problems he'll face as project director.

"I'm coming in without the knowledge I should have, but I've been doing the homework. Right now, I think it's a mat-

ter of finalizing the designs."

In addition to that job, Smith called the selection of a construction manager for the project another priority item.

Before he left, former director Baumgartner voiced concern over project's lack of a construction manager as well as its lack of staff and contracts with architects.

Even though Smith will begin work in the new post today, Baumgartner's resignation is not effective until Feb. 16.

As Smith moves over to the new position, Ernie Drapela will become acting parks and recreation director. Currently Drapela is assistant director of the department.

Living

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analysis of what the office had done for the county. Some, like Barb West, community relations director, complained OAT lacked direction.

"The dream and vision of where OAT wanted to go was really incredible. The reality had some problems. It was never defined, exactly what they were supposed to do. Were they to do research or staff programs?"

Sadler answers that OAT's involvement was different for different ventures.

"Our approach evolved as the projects evolved. Some we designed and turned over to others for implementation. Others required a greater level of involvement and we staffed them."

Direction, or the lack of it, aside, West says the office was plagued at first by the fact it didn't always package information in standard ways.

"Process is so important when you're working in a bureaucracy. If you somewhat needlessly alienate people, it's going to be a lot harder to accomplish your goals."

Sadler admits the office's approach started out a little casual.

"Part of the informality was because some of us worked with county people when we were on the outside. We were used to dealing with them as individuals rather than county employees in the hierarchy."

But the dealing of OAT staffers with other county employees is no longer a worry. It's safe to predict the office won't be rejuvenated under the new board when it takes office in January. The commission will expand to five members elected from districts where the three current members represent the county at large, giving more-liberal Eugene a lot of control over county policy. There's fear the new board will be more conservative, jeopardizing experiments like OAT.

"It's closer to fact than fear," says one county employee. "In the county staff there's some uneasiness about what's going to happen."

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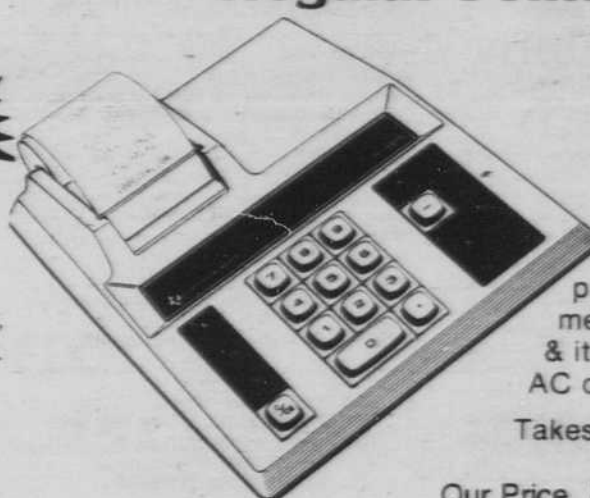


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