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The Riverfront Research Park Issues

Student input questioned

By Darin Honey
Of the Emerald

Although the Riverfront Research Park is nearing its final planning stages, ASUO President Steve Nelson believes University students have not had enough input in the decision-making process.

Nelson criticized the project's administrators for not involving students because students are not represented on three Riverfront Research Park committees.

Two of the committees, the Design Advisory Committee and the Research Advisory Committee, were appointed by University President Paul Olum. The third committee, the Riverfront Research Park Commission, advises Olum and the Eugene City Council.

Another factor contributing to the lack of student input was the disbanding of the Riverfront Research Park Student Review Committee, a subcommittee of the Campus Planning Committee, Nelson said. It was disbanded because "theoretically, our work was done," he said.

This was a much-needed committee, Nelson said. Not only did it give students greater input, it put vital information right in front of the student government so it always knew of current developments, he said. Without a student committee, the ASUO has to work much harder, he added.

But Rosemary Pryor of the Eugene Development Department said there have been a number of opportunities for local citizens and University students alike to voice their opinions. When something gets as much attention as the Riverfront Research Park, the city needs to be more assertive in order to get some quality feedback, she said.

Pryor urged students go get involved so all concerns can be aired.

In April and May alone, five public hearings or forums have been scheduled. This is a chance for students to say what they think about the issues, Pryor said.

Nelson is critical of such forums, however, saying he doesn't believe they are effective. He believes project representatives don't take student or public input seriously, he said.

Pryor said that's not the case. Public input has been seriously considered from the start of the project, she said.

At the first forum, the Carley Group (the developer) and the architect (ELS/Elbasani and Logan of Berkeley, Calif.) came with blank paper to develop plans, Pryor said. Issues raised concerned the general design, transportation and recreation, she said.

Discussion from the meeting was transcribed and sent to ELS, which then developed four plans for the park, Pryor said. On April 16, ELS returned to Eugene for the second forum to present the plans, and as Pryor put it, to further refine discussion from the first forum.

A very small number of students have attended the meetings so far, Pryor said. Most recently, no more than a dozen students attended the April 16 forum that attracted more than 250 citizens, she said.

Both University advisory committees meet on campus, and the Riverfront Research Park Commission alternates its meeting place between the Eugene Permit and Information Center downtown and the EMU, she added.

Aside from the lack of student input, the ASUO opposes the research park for two reasons: the student government disagrees with the proposed site and opposes the idea of classified research at the park.

The ASUO says the riverfront is the wrong place to build a research park. Nelson questions whether an alternate site was properly sought and whether the site will work.

He said the playing fields located north of the railroad tracks are of secondary importance to the ASUO.

Even though the University has agreed to ban weapons research and research harmful to human life, the ASUO isn't happy with a provision that allows for non-weapons-related classified research. The ASUO argues that if any classified research is allowed, weapons research still could take place because no one will know exactly what is being researched.

To Nelson's chagrin, Pryor said she expects the project to go through, and Nelson conceded "there's no sure way it can be stopped."

The University's involvement in the Riverfront Research Park project has continuously raised concerns from students, faculty and local citizens. As the planning of the park progresses, the pros and the cons of its construction are discussed with increasing vigor.

Park could provide student jobs and revive lagging local economy

By Rosanne Roberts
Of the Emerald

More jobs and internships might become available to University students if the Riverfront Research Park is developed.

"To provide additional financial opportunities for the University of Oregon, its faculty and students, and for the community" is one of the park's top goals, according to the Riverfront Commission, which oversees the park's planning.

Because the park is still in its planning stages, it's uncertain what specific businesses it will attract.

But the commission hopes to include tenants engaged in activities such as industrial research and development, data processing and computer software development, as well as firms providing business, educational and governmental research and consulting services.

"Pieces of the Riverfront project should be developed and ready to begin occupancy in about a year and a half," said Larry Smith, head of the Career Planning and Placement Office at the University. Smith is also a member of the Research Advisory Committee.

The immediate impact of employment is uncertain, but "within the first three months they'll probably begin doing some hiring," Smith said.

Smith added that most companies participating in the park will probably have existing organizations and businesses elsewhere.

"We're interested in this project because it takes advantage of educational workers," said Cathy Briner from the Eugene Development Department. "The park will diversify this area's job employment with quality jobs, no minimum wage jobs."

However, one of the advantages for businesses that move into the Riverfront Research Park is the "concentration of young, bright

people that don't cost much," said David Povey, a planning, public policy and management professor at the University and a member of the Riverfront Design Advisory Committee.

Povey and some graduate students from the PPM department have surveyed firms located in currently operating research parks. According to their survey, university programs rank-ordered by importance to the companies were: engineering, computer science, graduate science, business, medical, biology/microbiology, law and liberal arts.

"It's not only sciences, but those with writing skills that the businesses will probably employ," Povey said.

Jeff Tehnel, president of Dynamic Inc., a software company presently located at Valley River Center, said he would move to the Riverfront Research Park because it would be a nicer environment and would foster better relations with the University's computer science department.

Tehnel currently has two University students working for him, but would probably hire more if the company were located at the park. "because they'd be easier to get hold of."

Nancy Willard, president of Eugene Software Council, agrees with Tehnel, but she is hesitant about the park itself. "There's too much emphasis on building and not on the technology transfer itself," Willard said. "What's primary to work on is the technology transfer between the University and the community."

According to Battelle, a consulting firm for the Riverfront project, the park "may make a major contribution to sustaining, diversifying, and in some respects revitalizing the economy of Eugene, and most, if not all of Lane County."

Park's location brings environmental concerns

By Karen Irmsher
Of the Emerald

John Baldwin, director of the Environmental Studies Center at the University, said plans to build the proposed Riverfront Research Park raise a number of environmental concerns.

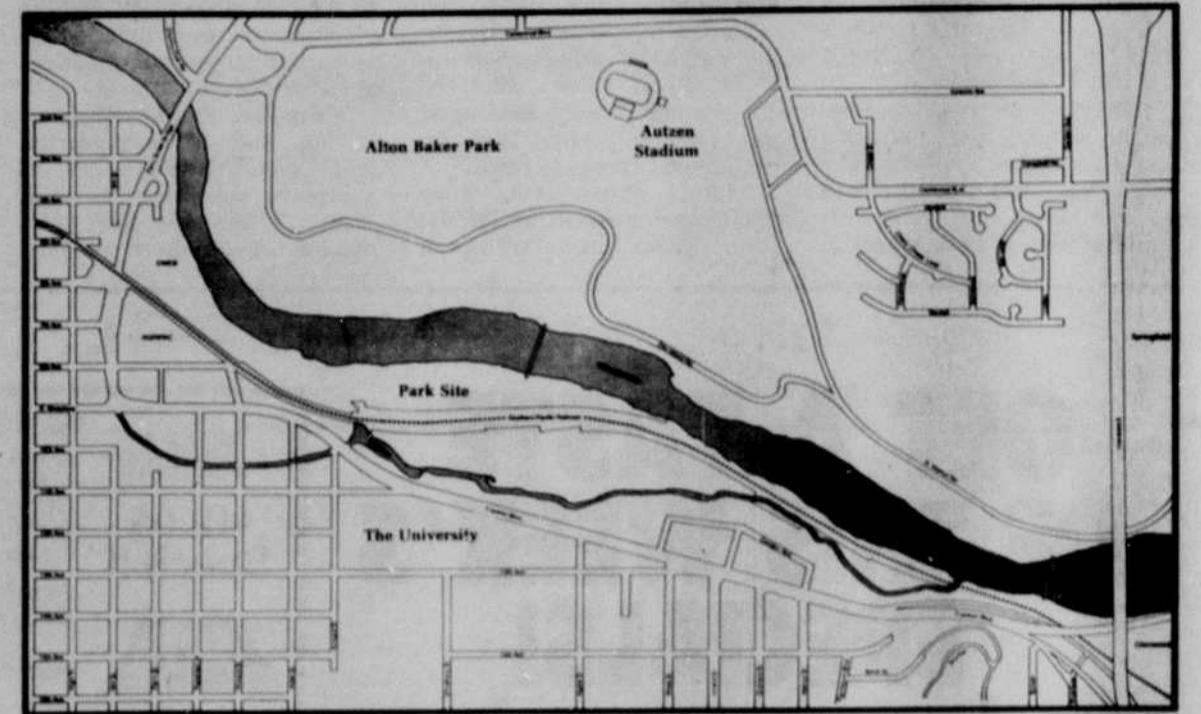
Baldwin makes it clear that while he is not an opponent of the park, these issues must be adequately addressed before development of the site begins.

The proposed park, in the research and planning stages since fall 1985, would be located on a 71-acre site adjacent to the University campus between Franklin Boulevard and the Willamette River.

While primarily a joint project of the University and the city of Eugene, it would use land owned by the State Board of Higher Education. As envisioned, it would include one million square feet of development and an estimated 3,300 tenants engaging in activities such as industrial research and development, data processing and computer software development.

Other firms would provide business, educational, and governmental research and consulting services.

Thus far, most of the vocal objections to the park have been based on the issues of classified research, loss of the University soccer field and failure to comply with land-use planning



ning that silicon chip-type industries are not as clean as we once thought," he said.

• Maintaining solar access and a natural environment on the bike path. University geography professor Al Urquhart has been to the courts numerous times in the last couple of years over this, says Baldwin.

• Loss of open space and recreational fields. The question is whether the loss of these fields would adversely affect the University's educational environment.

• Transportation access. How will the increased traffic flowing in and out of the park affect the surrounding area?

• Foot traffic. Crossing a high-speed arterial such as Franklin Boulevard can be hazardous. Pedestrian access over, or under Franklin would be necessary for safety he says.

Barbara Kelley, director of Oregonians Protecting Our Water, raises three other concerns. She said the park guidelines have not forbidden (private or non-governmental) research. She is worried that some chemical company, for instance, might be doing secret research involving toxic chemicals or new strains of bacteria, and release the toxins into the groundwater or river.

• Protecting the air, groundwater and river-water quality. Since the park will be directly on the south bank of the river, any release of toxic materials will immediately enter the river's ecosystem. "We are lea-

there," she said.

Thirdly, she says the proposed park is within the 100-year flood plain. A major flood occurs in Eugene approximately once every 100 years. Such a flood could rise into areas of the park used for nuclear or chemical research, for instance, and spread toxins into the groundwater, land and river, she says.

Kelley thinks developers should build the park somewhere else.

Many of these issues have already been studied and debated to great length. Pat Decker, a senior planner for the city of Eugene, says environmental concerns over the park's development have been taken into account during every step of the planning process, and will continue to be considered as they arise.

"One of the benefits of lots of public involvement is that it will raise concerns we (the city) wouldn't think of," she said.

About toxic emissions into the environment, Decker said "this site isn't any different from the rest of Eugene. It will be subject to the same conditions that other areas are."

She cites the Bertelson Slough area, in west Eugene, as being similar to a wetlands area, and it has industrial zoning.

Access to the bikeway has been assured by adopting "setbacks"—the distance that must be maintained from the river bank and bikeway to developments. The most recent

city proposal, adopted by the city April 20, states that "all structures, parking areas, streets, and access drives shall maintain a minimum setback of 35 feet from the top of the south bank of the Willamette River," and 15 feet from the bikeway.

Setbacks of at least 50 feet are designated on either side of the path between the Autzen Stadium footbridge and the underpass beneath the railroad tracks.

Also, no structure within 75 feet of the river may exceed three stories, or 45 feet in height.

Decker says people have a misperception about the Greenway. Some people think that developments of any kind are forbidden along the Willamette River Greenway, but that's not the case she says. It's just that hearings officials must decide whether planned developments are appropriate.

Parking and traffic flows are being carefully considered in the planning, Decker says. Also, the city proposes "to provide for the protection and enhancement of the natural vegetative fringe along the Willamette River."

On May 6, University President Paul Olum will host a public forum to discuss the political, philosophical and moral issues concerning the proposed Riverfront Research Park. It will take place at 7:30 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom. All interested people are invited to attend.

"This site isn't any different from the rest of Eugene. It will be subject to the same conditions that other areas are."
— Pat Decker, Eugene city planner

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