

Discussion on fairground location continues

Community members
sounded off at
Tuesday's meeting

BY CHRIS HAGAN
NEWS REPORTER

Eugene residents voiced their support for the Lane County Fairgrounds at a town hall meeting Tuesday night.

The meeting, arranged by Lane County Commissioner Peter Sorenson, was held to assess community opinions on what to do with the fairgrounds property, known as the Lane Events Center. There has been discussion recently on whether to sell the property and move the fair to another site.

Most speakers, many of whom were representatives or members of local businesses and organizations, were concerned about what would happen to their groups if the fairgrounds were moved.

"Moving the location of our healthy businesses is scary," said Beth Little,

general manager of the Saturday Market. Many of the vendors at the Saturday Market's Holiday Market, which takes place at the Events Center, live off the money from the November and December event for months, Little said.

Speakers from organizations such as the Willamette Valley Model Railroad Club and the Willamette Valley Arms Collectors Association told of their attachment to the fairgrounds and the benefits their visitors bring to the city.

"We brought in 700 animals, but also thousands of people from all over the world," said Leslie Hildreth, coordinator of Black Sheep Gathering. "These people spend money in Eugene."

A major issue has been the economic condition of the fair. Fair operations, the money gained from all events at the fairgrounds, have lost money each of the last two fiscal years. The deficits have been covered by excess Transient Room Taxes, which are taxes on hotel and motel rooms.

To cover the \$379,670 in losses dur-

ing the 2005 fiscal year, the fair received more than \$307,000 of excess TRT taxes. But some residents questioned the need for a self-sufficient fairgrounds.

"We don't look at parks as a drain or needing to be self-sustaining," Eugene resident Rachel Kidd said. Kidd stressed the attachment residents have for the fairgrounds beyond the budget deficits and aging facilities.

"This is my fair," Kidd said, "my fairgrounds."

There has been concern about the fairgrounds' small size and aging facilities. The Lane County Fair Board has said it does not believe the fair to be viable at its current site for more than 10 years because of those concerns.

The Lane County Board of Commissioners has twice rejected offers to sell the fairgrounds, once in 2003 and once this year. On Sept. 13, the Commission voted 3-2 to not sell the fairgrounds for 10 years. The board also voted 3-2 for the Fair Board to study the problems members are concerned about, authorizing up to

\$50,000 for the study.

If the fairgrounds is not moved, many say the existing facilities will have to be upgraded. But Fair Board member Bob Zagorin cautioned that new facilities will not be able to upgrade the Events Center to a Class A facility with on-site hotels and other amenities.

"The best scenario is a Class B facility," Zagorin said. "We still have aging animal facilities and an aging trade show hall."

Despite the commitments from the Commission and from the community, Zagorin cautioned that more needs to be done.

"Just saying we won't sell for 10 years doesn't make the issues go away," Zagorin said.

Bonny Bettman, Eugene city councilor for the fairgrounds ward, offered suggestions on possible uses for the space. Bettman wants to keep the fairgrounds in its current space, but she wishes to keep commercial development off the land if that can't happen. "It would be most beneficial to the

city and the neighborhood for the long-term if it is developed as neighborhoods, if it is not a fairground," Bettman said. Bettman is worried that commercial development could hurt traffic in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Sorenson was impressed with the optimism and enthusiasm of the speakers. "There was a strong outpouring of support for small businesses," Sorenson said after the meeting.

Sorenson was surprised by the amount of support for businesses rather than just the fair.

"There weren't many people saying 'the fair is great,' Sorenson said, "but they instead focused on the other 51 weeks of the year."

Sorenson noticed a dominant theme from the evening's speakers.

"(It is) the idea that this is a public facility and a public space that needs to be protected," he said.

Contact the city and state politics reporter at chagan@dailyemerald.com

Katrina: University provides financial assistance to displaced students

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shut down.

"We looked for some kind of indication of enrollment," University Director of Admissions Martha Pitts said.

Once evidence of enrollment was obtained, the University sought evidence that students had paid tuition at their home institutions. If students had already paid, their tuition and fees were waived. The University will not ask for reimbursement.

"We're saying: 'It's nobody's fault,'" University Vice President for Finance and Administration Frances Dyke said. "They paid for an education, and

we're happy to help both that student and that institution."

The School of Law began classes on Aug. 17, 12 days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, forcing it to act especially fast to assist students from the New Orleans area.

"We offered room for up to 10 law students to come here," Richardson said. "A problem with students coming in here is that we start early. We knew that not a

lot of people would probably come, but we didn't know."

Richardson said that because the School of Law has only enrolled two displaced students, it has been easier to offer comprehensive assistance.

"We're able to do a lot of this because we're so small"

LIANE RICHARDSON | assistant dean for student affairs at the School of Law

In addition to waiving tuition, the School of Law waived the resource fees, provided laptops on loan

and provided free housing. West Publishing Co. offered free law textbooks and fellow law students purchased

school supplies for the displaced students.

"We're able to do a lot of this because we're so small," Richardson said.

Richardson credits the strength of the School of Law's tutorial program with helping law students catch up. Professors have also offered their time to give displaced students extra help, she said.

The University will also participate in a program with the Sloan Consortium, a national group involved in online education, to offer free online courses to displaced students.

The program, called the Sloan

Semester, will allow students at the community college, undergraduate and graduate levels to take a variety of courses. The University will offer courses in geology and multicultural arts.

The University's efforts to assist students have caused Pavlich to consider staying in Eugene even after Tulane's doors reopen.

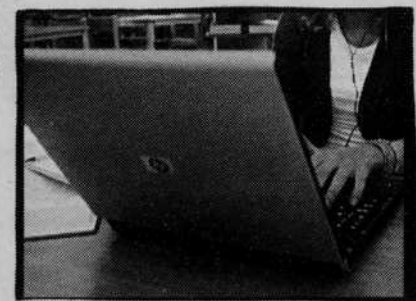
"I'm thinking of staying here permanently," Pavlich said. "After the hurricane, New Orleans has kind of, you know, lost its charm."

Contact the higher education reporter at jbailley@dailyemerald.com

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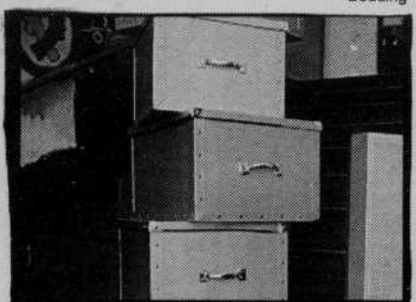
All furnishings pictured are from Wal-Mart.



HP Laptop



Bedding



Storage

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