

Advisory group agrees with task force on Sellwood Bridge recommendations

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

For once citizens and officials saw eye to eye, as the Sellwood Bridge Public Advisory Group voted in February to call for a new bridge pretty much in accord with the recommendations of the project's Citizen Task Force.

Despite the pleas of condominium owners who may be displaced by the project the PAG, made up of representatives of participating agencies and jurisdictions, voted unanimously Alternative D, a new bridge immediately to the south of the existing structure.

The advisory group also agreed to use a pedestrian-activated traffic signal rather than a conventional one on the east end, and a signal rather than an elaborate interchange on the west end, as the Task Force had recommended. The PAG called for most of the bridge to have just two traffic lanes rather than three, an issue the Task Force had split almost evenly on.

The issue will now be referred to the Milwaukie and Portland City Councils, the Clackamas and Multnomah County Commissions, the Metro Council and the TriMet Board, all of whom are expected to endorse the PAG recommendations.

The only significant questioning of the proposal came from Metro Councilor Robert Liberty. As he has in the past, he questioned how the \$300 million project will be funded. "I'm concerned we're making these decisions before funding is planned," he complained.

"The more expensive it is, the less likely it will be funded. We may be setting up false expectations." He said he wished that the Task Force had been consulted

about funding, and that staff had done "reality-based planning."

Portland Mayor Sam Adams responded, "We can't go for funding unless we have a project. I would prefer to move forward."

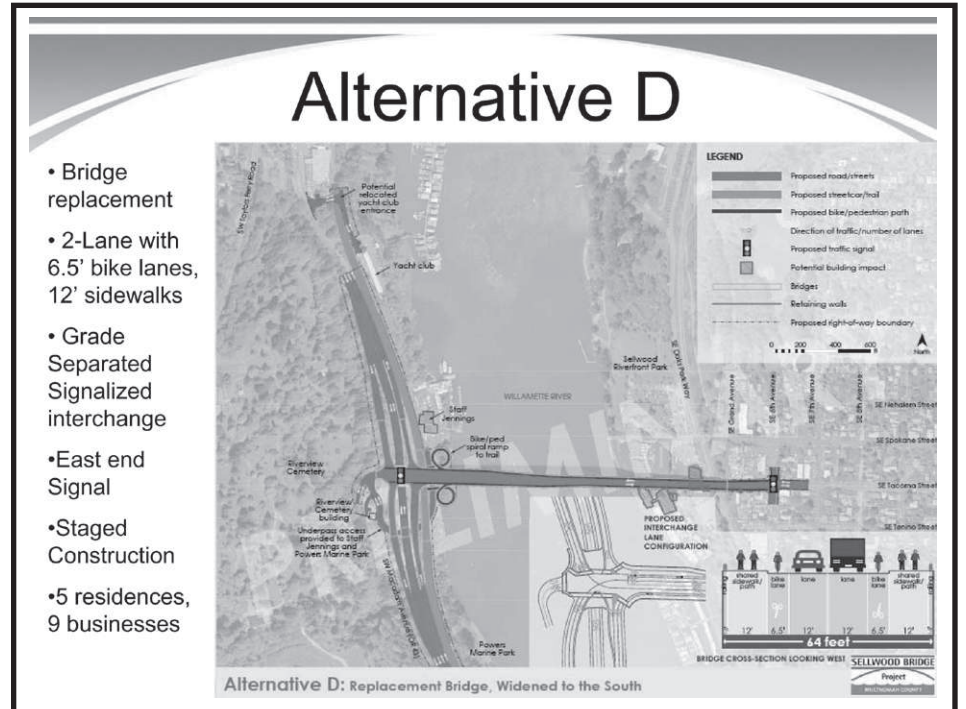
The Task Force examined several possible courses, including rehabilitation of the deteriorating 1926 bridge. The final choice was between Alternatives D and E. Alternative D would necessitate demolition of four units in the Sellwood Harbor, and one in the River Park, condominiums.

Alternative E, which would swing northward from the east side approach on Southeast Tacoma Street, would avoid these impacts but create others; it would come close enough to the Springwater Corridor, Sellwood Riverfront Park and Oaks Pioneer Church to negatively affect them. It would also be more costly, staff found.

Condominium owners disputed these findings before the PAG. John Holmes of Sellwood Harbor said Alternative D would take out not four units but 12, and reduce the value of 37 more. "I think 'E' is better, but either way it's dependent on financing," he said. "If the money isn't available, just do a rehab."

Another condo owner, Ed Murphy, said that proponents of Alternative D "used emotional appeals sometimes not based on facts." Alternative E was presented as being 75 feet wide, thus having the potential to funnel more traffic through Southeast Tacoma Street and someday force its expansion, he said.

If built narrowly, "E can be built faster and cheaper, it doesn't have a material effect on the park or the church, it doesn't take out any homes," Murphy said.



(graphic courtesy of Mike Pullen, Multnomah County)

However, most of those who testified felt that Alternative E would be a threat to the park, the church, the corridor and, especially, to Southeast Tacoma Street. Barbara Barber, a Sellwood resident, owner of Three Square Grill (in Hillsdale) and a member of the Task Force, said, "When I first moved in Tacoma was impenetrable; there was no New Seasons, no Safeway, and there were shootings at 2 a.m."

Since then, Barber said, it is moving toward becoming "a model for what the rest of Portland can be. It would be a

shame if the bridge were to take out the assets of our neighborhood." She cited the Sellwood-Moreland Improvement League (SMILE)'s march in favor of Alternative D.

Paul Notti of SMILE said that Alternative E would involve "the unknown, the unknowable and the unwise." Citing general public support he said, "Not just some people, but everyone I've talked to favors D." (This produced a chorus of "No!" from the condominium owners.)

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