

Willamette Greenway plans criticized by design commission

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Portland Design Commission reviewed plans in December for the South Waterfront section of the Willamette Greenway trail. The PDC repeated the complaints long voiced by area residents: too much attention to natural habitat, not enough to human amenities.

The South Waterfront part of the Greenway, 1.2 miles long by 100 feet wide, had always been envisioned as a combination of public amenities and natural habitat.

There will be two separated public trails, one for pedestrians and one for bicyclists. There will be a

wide lawn at the foot of Southwest Gibbs Street, east of the Aerial Tram landing.

The debris-laden shoreline will be reconstructed as shallow water before a beach rising gradually to higher land. However, plans for a boat dock, and most public access to the water's edge, have been scrapped.

Planner Kara Fioravanti said this was done at the insistence of the National Marine Fisheries Service, which fears that a dock could create a hiding place for predators that feed on young fish.

"Those interested in protecting fish want to limit human access, and they're very adamant," she said. "We had a very different plan in

mind. Frankly, the federal agencies said they weren't interested."

This did not satisfy Commission members. David Wark said, "There will be thousands of people here, and there's not even limited access to the river; there's no access. Can't there be a balance?"

Commission member Ben Kaiser said, "We have a goal to 'embrace the river,' and if not here, where? The entire city wants a different solution, but one agency will wipe it all out."

Commission member David Keltner told Fioravanti, "The amount of work you've done on restoring natural habitat is going unrewarded. (Federal agencies) are not giving back anything."

Commission chair Gwen Millius said, "NMS has said we have too many docks, and unless some come out we can't have any more. There is a tension between interests and we have to respect that, but I don't think it's balanced fairly now."

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