

Emergency response center planned for former Sears Armory

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The Humvees are long gone; so are the weekend Army Reserve units. The grass needs mowing and the large concrete barriers still remain.

The process of transforming the former SFC Jerome F. Sears Army Reserve Center on Southwest Multnomah Boulevard is proceeding slowly.

A community process involving countless hours of input and meetings took place for years. Letters were written; community based organizations weighed in with their vision of the property, and City of Portland officials presented their wish lists.

"The main reason the community's vote [to have affordable housing] was rejected was that the city had no money to proceed," stated longtime resident Stu Ellis, whose property is a stone's throw from the center.

"In the end, the mayor made the final decision," recounted Ellis.

And what happened next was decided by five City Council members: an emergency response center would have a new home at the decommissioned reserve center.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) then gave up ownership of the property in September 2012. It was donated to the city.

Fast forward to 2013. Architects hired by the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) presented renditions of the new facility at the April meeting of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association.

"Transforming the 3.7 acre campus," said PBEM Director Carmen Merlo, "involves many steps. First, there needs to be a budget attached. Second, the money needs to be allocated."

Finally, the property needs to have a formal process for applying for rezoning. It currently is R-1 (residential). The City would like to have it rezoned to EG-2 (general employment).

Since the DOD was exempt from the permitting process, the city needs to apply for its own permits. When asked about a timeline, the answer was anyone's guess.

In the meantime, preliminary architectural renditions were shared.

Outside, the metal fabricated

building located on the west side of the property will be moved to the other side of the main building. In its place, a parking lot and area for mobile media units will be installed.

In the large parking lot, emergency road equipment will be stored along with sand, gravel bins, and de-icing material.

A commercial fueling station will have different grades of gasoline, diesel, and bio-fuels.

The 1960s-era main building needs to be remodeled and upgraded to code but architects say not much construction needs to happen. "A few walls to be moved and ADA accessible restrooms added," explained one of the architects.

A large auditorium will be retained for large deployment gatherings. Meeting rooms, a full size kitchen, and 'situation' room for the mayor and other top city officials will be designed.

Finally, a press room, a new elevator, and rooms for city tenants will be designed. If possible, City of Portland Water and Transportation bureaus will have offices here.

One of neighbors' concerns seemed to focus on a long six-foot high wall that would run the length of Multnomah Boulevard.

Barbed wire fencing would re-



Moss Street neighbors, Martin and Marcia Waugh along with Judy Ellis, discuss the City's plan to redesign the Sears Armory. Their properties butt up against the back of the campus. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

main along with added shrubbery around the back perimeter.

"We understand that there are lots of questions still," architects explained. "The fence can include art or other aesthetic qualities. Or we can remove the fence completely. The process has just begun."

The community will have plenty of opportunity to weigh in on development. "We plan to come back to these [Multnomah Neighborhood Association] meetings,"

Merlo assured.

"I've been very pleased with the communication of this project," said Ellis. "But in the end, we're the people that live here and will have to deal with the commotion."

For information on the planned Emergency Response Center, see www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem. Stay in touch with the Multnomah Neighborhood Association meetings via Facebook or www.swni.org/Multnomah.

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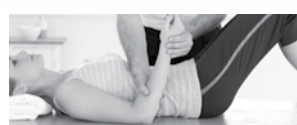


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Jennifer Williamson

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background checks for purchasers and mandatory training as a precondition for concealed weapons permits.

Getting the votes for any of these will be difficult, she said. Williamson quoted rural law enforcement officials as saying that cuts in their budgets made private gun ownership necessary. "They're saying, 'Don't take people's guns away because we have no public sector backup,'" she said.



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