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Neighbors concerned about proposed amphitheater in Spring Garden Park

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Groundbreaking is just months away for improvements to Spring Garden Park, five acres between Southwest Dolph Court and Spring Garden Street, yet controversy plagues the project.

Neighbors living closest to the park have learned that a paved amphitheater, along with electricity hookups, have been added to the plan.

Park officials beg to differ and have claimed they have vetted the process with the parks advisory committee, neighbors, and community members over the last year.

The site was originally a meadow for dairy cows and then purchased by Portland Public Schools for a proposed school. The park bureau then acquired the property in 1999 from the school district which was disposing of surplus lands.

Friends of Spring Garden Park won

a \$10,000 grant from Umpqua Bank in 2011 to install a nature play area at the undeveloped park site.

Additional funds, up to \$3.4 million, were granted from Portland Parks and Recreation to expand and develop the natural play areas. Plan components include a sand box, logs and boulders, and natural meadows.

The additional funds will add picnic tables, benches, a covered park structure, play structures, and a Portland loo (toilet). Native plants



Dr. John Minahan (left, shown with neighbors Ken Boltz and Cathy Frost) has canvassed the Multnomah neighborhood with a petition asking Portland Parks and Recreation to remove the proposed amphitheater from plans for Spring Garden Park. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

will be retained and other landscaping added.

But according to neighbors, original plans did not include an amphitheater

let alone hookups for amplified music.

Ken Boltz, who lives directly across the street, can easily see the proposed
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Park bureau and school district continue to test lead levels in drinking water

By Jack Rubinger
The Southwest Portland Post

Mark Ross, a spokesman for Portland Parks & Recreation, said lead test results of drinking water at the Multnomah Arts Center in Southwest Portland are encouraging.

Over the past two months the park bureau found 11 instances of

elevated lead levels at the center, and have been working with a certified industrial hygienist to determine how to fix, repair or otherwise mitigate the drinking water there.

Currently, said Ross, one water fountain with bottle filler is open for use, and drinking water service is also provided. Visitors can fill up their own water bottles to reduce the use of plastic. Other fixtures at MAC,

including sinks in individual rooms, are marked "Do Not Drink" or shut down.

Multnomah County Health Department authorities say they have conducted more than 15,000 blood tests over the last three years on children and teens. According to the county, elevated blood lead levels were found in 188 people, but none of the cases were traced to lead in drinking water from any source.

Ross pointed out that there are no federal, state or local regulations requiring water testing for parks facilities. Ross explained that as soon as the park bureau became aware of the community conversation around lead, officials quickly sought to determine if any testing had been done in park bureau facilities.

"As soon as the director and commissioner-in-charge realized there had been testing done, the park bureau closed off access to Multnomah Arts Center drinking fountains and provided bottled water, issued communications to staff, the public, and media, and began a

review," said Ross.

The preliminary review initiated by the park bureau revealed the need for improved protocols on reporting and mitigating such problems.

At the Multnomah Arts Center, water fountains were closed off, signs were posted, bottled water was provided, and a plan was launched for testing for lead using guidance from the Portland Water Bureau, Multnomah County, Oregon Health Authority and a certified industrial hygienist.

On June 20, the park bureau sent out a water quality testing update on what had been completed to that point. "We are conducting lead testing to ensure we are not contributors to lead in drinking water," said Ross.

"The most important takeaway for people regarding lead testing at Portland Parks & Recreation sites is that if anyone has a concern about potential exposure, they should get a test through their physician or through the county. We continue to do testing at other PP&R facilities so that our community and staff can be assured."

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Bottled water is being provided at the Multnomah Arts Center while fountains and sink faucets are shut down for lead inspections. (Photo courtesy of Portland Parks and Recreation)

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4207 SE Woodstock Blvd #509
Portland, OR 97206