

Hospital vs. Riverfront

Should we pay Triad \$25 million to pave over riverfront, or build a park?

McKenzie-Willamette/Triad hospital's proposed relocation to the riverfront EWEB property appears headed for stiff opposition as the relocation has linked itself to one of the most controversial development plans in the city's history.

Matthews says. The hospital will be like "a large tall wall of commercial development between downtown and the river," Matthews says. "The hospital is way too much intensive commercial development for that site where it should be Eugene's downtown riverfront."

A better option for the EWEB site would be to create a riverfront park with pedestrian walkways and perhaps small restaurants and a city natural history and local history museum in a renovated EWEB steam plant, according to Matthews.

Other cities, such as Portland and San Francisco, have gone to great time and expense to remove riverfront highways and create parks to reconnect their cities to the river, Matthews points out. "It makes me shake my head," he says.

Jan Spencer of Citizens for Public Accountability agrees that the area should be a park. "There are cities all over the country that would love to have a riverfront like that," he says. "It just doesn't make any sense."

The cost of the hospital will be more than a lost riverfront park. The city also plans to give Triad up to \$25 million for the project. Most of the money will come from using a controversial urban renewal district to divert property tax revenues from city and county services and schools to instead fund new roads to serve the hospital.

"It seems like a big waste of money," Taylor said.

The taxpayer subsidy will support higher profits for Triad, a for-profit Texas corporation that owns 53 hospitals across the nation. Triad paid its CEO James Shelton \$1 million in salary, plus a \$1.1 million bonus, plus \$5 million to \$13 million in stock options last year, according to a 2003 annual report.

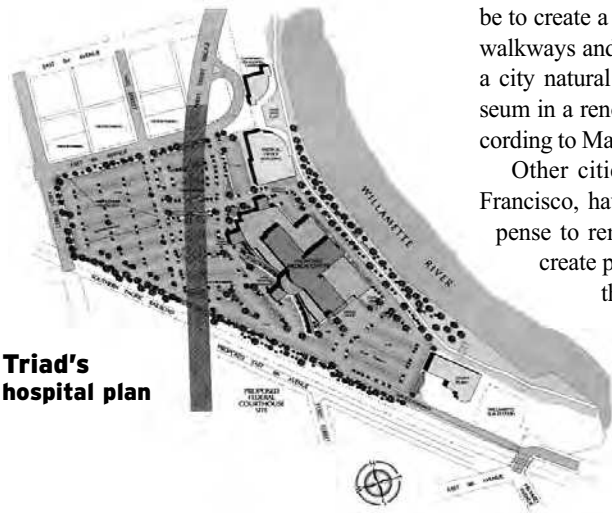
It's unclear exactly what the city will gain from the huge expense in riverfront land and tax subsidies. The city will meet its goal of locating a hospital near downtown. But Triad's design features acres of surface parking lots paving over the entire site almost to the river and appears to do little to encourage the use of alternative transportation and won't create an attractive, walkable urban area.

The city will gain new hospital workers near downtown, but it will also lose 460 EWEB employees when the utility likely relocates to the edge of the city. It's also unclear how the site is better than other central locations for the new hospital, such as in Glenwood.

But despite lingering questions, the city appears to be rushing forward with the massive project. The council meeting on the momentous decision lasted only 30 minutes and the plans never went to the city Planning Commission nor to a public hearing.

Taylor said the city has been too secretive about the plans and should leave the decision to the next mayor and council. The recent election "showed pretty clearly that people were unhappy with the policies of the current council."

"For this to be going forward willy-nilly with zero public process is just really shocking and horrible," Matthews said. **EW**



Triad's hospital plan

Plans for the new hospital include a new highway along the riverfront through the UO's controversial Riverfront Research Park. The UO's and city's plans to develop the riverfront natural area have been stymied for decades by strong community opposition. In 1998 about 650 members of the university community signed a petition opposing the riverside development and 250 students and community members marched to the river to protest the project.

"I think it's a terrible idea," says Friends of Eugene President Kevin Matthews of the hospital road proposal. Matthews says the new road along with the railroad tracks and an already planned new highway along the south side of the tracks will create a 200-ft.-wide barrier to accessing the river. Long stretches of the roadways, he notes, will be in deep trenches to descend down to underpasses under the tracks. The road plans are "completely contrary" to the city's adopted plans to reconnect downtown to the river, Matthews says.

At a City Council meeting last week, Councilor Bonny Bettman warned that the hospital was "guaranteeing delay" by tying itself to the controversial Riverfront Research Park road.

Councilor Betty Taylor said she "would never vote for" degrading the riverfront by extending the Research Park road to the hospital. She said it appeared the city was using the hospital as "a back door" excuse to develop the research park area.

The council approved a motion for staff to study other options for accessing the site, but a strong majority of councilors appeared to back the riverfront road.

Councilor David Kelly, a possible swing vote should the issue reach the newly elected council in January, said he was willing to sacrifice the riverfront for the hospital. "I recognize that is something that may have to give," he said of protecting the riverfront from the new road.

But even if the city does find an alternative to the riverfront road, building such a massive hospital along the river is a bad idea,

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