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Zulu Dragons
I'chelle and the
Circle of Light
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Sunday, Jan. 9th

Doors 5pm • Music Starts 5:30pm

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that what they're promising today, we'll get 15 years down the road," he says. "They're selling something they can't build."

A bad precedent

If the land swap succeeds, it will be unprecedented. The Salem Planning Department considered a similar plan 10 years ago but never went through with it, as did the Klamath Falls Planning Department in 2001.

Riner says that Parks has a history of difficult negotiations with developers, and the land swap is an opportunity to send a different message. "We want to show private developers that we are creative and we will work with land owners," she says. "We can't treat them as the bad guys. They have things that the public is interested in getting access to."

But Perle worries that the land swap would send the message that the city is willing to bend rules for developers. "That is a threat to land use planning," she says. "It opens the door quite widely to all kinds of sweetheart deals."

A SPLIT COUNCIL

To date, the City Council has been split regarding the land swap proposal. Last July, Councilors David Kelly and Scott Meisner — representing Laurel Hill Valley and Santa Clara, respectively — voted first for the motion to buy the McDougals' Santa Clara property outright and then, when that failed, for the initiation of the UGB shift application. The latter motion passed, with only Councilors Bettman and Betty Taylor opposing.

As of Jan. 3, the City Council has three new members. Kitty Piercy replaces Torrey as mayor; Chris Pryor replaces Nancy Nathanson as Ward 8 councilor; and Andrea Ortiz replaces Meisner as Ward 7 councilor, representing Santa Clara.

Piercy is interested in continuing the conversation about the land swap with residents and city staff. "I am under the impression that there is little support for this park location or the land swap in River Road and Santa Clara," she wrote by e-mail. "Residents want a park but not at this cost. They would like to be a part of an improved proposal and a solution that has greater support by the community. I hope that is what will transpire."

Ortiz has reservations about the land swap. She is concerned about urban sprawl, and she is reluctant to change the UGB. She also questions the need to pursue a large new park when the city lacks the funds to upgrade its existing parks. "Most people that I've spoken to are not in favor of this," Ortiz says. "We need to walk really cautiously and make sure we're considering all the options."

ALTERNATIVES

Eminent domain

Although the City Council tabled Bettman's motion to require the city to buy the Santa Clara park land outright, the option is still a possibility. The city can acquire the land using its power of eminent domain, which allows the government to buy private land for public use at a market value determined by jury.

But Riner says that the jury could assess the McDougals' land at up to \$100,000 per

acre — a 10-fold increase from its current value outside the UGB. Even if the city only sought 40 acres, the acquisition could cost \$4 million. "We're looking at a cost so prohibitive that we would have to walk away from the plan," Riner says.

A different site

Although Parks identified only one willing seller for the park, Bettman suggests that other property owners may not have understood the city's readiness to negotiate. "If people knew the extent to which the city was willing to bend over backwards, they might have been more willing to accommodate," she says.

Hamacher suggests locating a regional park at the now-closed Santa Clara Elementary School, which is located on a bus route within the UGB and contains structures that could be adapted into park facilities. Riner says that the site is too small, but SCCSPOS members suggest that smaller parks — inside the UGB and within walking distance for residents — might be exactly what Santa Clara needs. "Nothing grandiose like they're planning, but much more affordable and considerate of the community around it," Hamacher says.



Swap opponent Ken Hamacher

Riner says that Parks is already working on acquiring smaller parks in Santa Clara. The city set a goal to provide one 3-5 acre park within 1/2 mile of all Eugene residents, and since 2000 Parks has purchased five small plots for neighborhood parks in northwest Eugene. Riner says that the city is working on acquiring several more neighborhood parks in Santa Clara and east of River Road.

A pledge for open space

However the land swap proposal pans out, the city is determined to acquire more park land for Santa Clara. And Riner says that the city will pursue its goal of acquiring the Laurel Hill Valley property for incorporation into the Ridgeline Trail with or without the deal.

On its surface, the land swap proposal seems to pit farmland against forest, Santa Clara against Laurel Hill Valley, developers against anti-sprawl advocates and City Councilors against one another. But it also forces Eugeneans to discuss our priorities in land use planning, and a more desirable alternative may yet spring from that conversation.

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