

news Briefs

WEP BYPASS

Proponents of the West Eugene Parkway (WEP) are working on a way around the opposition of the Eugene City Council and Mayor by using a little-known council of local governments.

In recent months the Eugene delegation to the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) has opposed passing a list of road projects if they include the controversial freeway through wetlands. Proponents of the WEP on the MPC, led by County Commissioner Bobby Green and including representatives from Springfield, have refused to vote for the list of 66 projects unless it includes the WEP. The stalemate could interfere with the flow of federal road funding if it's not resolved by Sept. 30.

But in recent weeks Commissioner Green has looked to provisions in the by-laws of the Lane Council of Governments Board for a way to circumvent the MPC. The LCOG board originally delegated authority for the required local approval of the list of federal road projects to the MPC and could take back that authority, according to LCOG staff.

If that happened, the LCOG board, made up of representatives from the county and small and large cities, would have the final vote on the WEP. LCOG board meetings often have low attendance by board members

and the public. A straight vote would be highly undemocratic with the smallest city in the county having as many votes as Eugene, the largest city.

There is a provision in the LCOG bylaws for the Eugene representative to ask for a vote weighted by population. It's unclear how such an unprecedented vote would come out. Eugene has just under 50 percent of the population in the county. — Alan Pittman

TEEN CENTER GETS A PLACE

After months of working with the city and real estate appraiser John Brown, a trio of youth groups may finally get a teen center downtown.

The LEAD teen program, Youth Advisory Board and Juventud Faceta have found a building for the new teen center they're calling Nuestro Lugar/Our Place. The proposed center will be at 965 Oak Alley under the Overpark Garage.

The teens had earlier hoped to use the old fire station in City Hall, but the city told them in an April 28 meeting that the empty space wasn't up to code. According to D Cohen, LEAD's teen center co-coordinator, Brown stepped in to help. The Oak Alley building was a storage space, but the city was willing to clear out the city-owned space.

The group worked with the city of Eugene to get the necessary permissions and paperwork. Cohen says the teens and staff, hoping to receive help from local contractors, will spend the summer renovating and repairing the building. The new downtown teen center will open for the three groups to meet in the fall and for regular hours in the spring.

— Suzi Steffen

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



WIND RATES IN FLUX

EWEB's recent electricity rate increase, effective May 1, did not affect wind power rates. As a result, more EWEB customers can save money by switching to wind power — for a while, at least.

"At a certain level of consumption, it's cheaper for some people to go wind," said EWEB spokesman John Mitchell.

Under the current EWEB rate plan, consumers who choose conventional electricity pay higher rates when they use more energy. For example, the summer rate is \$0.042 per kilowatt-hour for the first 800 kilowatt-hours and \$0.059 per kilowatt-hour for the next 900 kilowatt-hours.

Consumers who subscribe to 100 percent wind power, however, pay a constant rate — \$0.053 per kilowatt-hour — no matter how much energy they use.

Under the old rate plan, wind power was cheaper than conventional power for households and businesses that used at least 2,600 kilowatt-hours per month in the summer and 3,800 kilowatt-hours per month the winter.

Under the new rate plan, wind power is cheaper for consumers who use at least 1,800 kilowatt-hours in the summer and 2,300 kilowatt-hours in the winter.

That news may cheer alternative-energy advocates and others concerned with EWEB's dependence on hydroelectric power, which damages salmon habitat and river ecosystems. But Mitchell also sees a downside to the dy-

PATTERSON CASE DISMISSED

The City of Eugene has dropped its case against Perry Patterson, a 56-year-old mother of two who was charged with criminal trespass after shouting "No" at a 2004 Republican campaign rally featuring U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney.

In September 2005, Municipal Court Judge Alan Leiman dismissed the trespass charge against Patterson, ruling that Eugene Police did not have the authority to remove Patterson from the public property outside the hangar. The story might have ended there, but City Prosecutor Mark Haight appealed the case to the Lane County Circuit Court.

In March, City Prosecutor C. Michael Arnold took over the case from Haight. In early May he filed a motion to withdraw the appeal, effectively dropping the charges against Patterson. Circuit Court Judge Karsten Rasmussen granted the motion on May 10.

Arnold explained that information uncovered by EW's Feb. 9 and 16 articles — that the "men in black" who removed Patterson from the rally were not federal agents, as EPD and the city prosecutor had assumed, but likely private security working for Cheney — was the city's primary motivation for dropping the case.

"This was new information, and it was a surprise to both EPD and our office when we learned that. It changed the analysis on the original security plan," Arnold said. "I'm relying on your research as well as the research from our investigation."

Also influencing Arnold's decision was a February ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in favor of a street preacher who was kicked out of private events on public property in Portland. The judges wrote that the preacher had a right to speak because no one



Lauren Regan (left) and Perry Patterson

would confuse his message (in this case, calling passing women "Jezebels") with event organizers' message.

The same logic can be applied to the Patterson case. "In essence, there's no way someone can confuse 'No, no, no' in response to comments by Cheney as her wanting to be part of the event," Arnold said.

But the identities of the "men in black" who took Patterson by the elbows and delivered her to EPD remain a mystery. In mid-February, Regan and Patterson had decided to file a civil suit against the men, alleging that they illegally ejected Patterson. But that suit is becoming increasingly unlikely, as Regan still hasn't been able to uncover the men's identities.

Regan said that the men were probably Bush/Cheney '04 campaign staffers who were directed to make the rally appear "Republican-perfect" for the media cameras, and their boss was likely Ken Millman, then the

head person in charge of the 2004 Bush/Cheney campaign rallies and now the chair of the Republican National Committee. But Cheney's office "is not releasing even a scintilla of information" regarding the staffers' identities, making a lawsuit against them difficult, she added.

Regan hopes that the Patterson case, which cost city and state taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars, will at least prompt a City Council resolution to prevent similar snafus in the future. "How can we, as a community, use this case to better ourselves and be sure that in a time of suppression, our community remains vibrant and our First Amendment rights protected?" she asked.

Patterson asks that her supporters donate to Regan's nonprofit, the Civil Liberties Defense Center, as Regan handled most of her case pro bono. "I couldn't have done this without her," she said. — Kera Abraham