

Fairmount Faces Arena

Fairmount negotiates for smarter development

Neighborhoods aren't perfect. Sometimes neighbors spy on each other through the windows at night, quibble about property lines and let their dogs poop in each other's yards. But here in Eugene, sometimes they're able to put all that aside long enough to manage the boundary that matters most: the line where the neighborhood ends and big development begins — even when the developer is the UO.

The neighbors of Fairmount, a historic neighborhood that borders the university campus, should be getting along quite nicely right now. Through legal appeals and negotiation, the Fairmount Neighbors Association has succeeded in reducing the potential impact on the neighborhood of the university's planned basketball arena.

The university was forced to obtain a conditional use permit (CUP) and provide a community impact statement before starting work on the arena after the Fairmount Neighbors mounted a legal appeal against the university this year.

The UO's CUP application was approved by a hearings official on Nov. 6, and is subject to appeal until Nov. 19. If there is no appeal, the decision becomes effective on Nov. 20.

Fairmount has been fighting against encroachment by the university for years, but

the basketball arena is the largest project that the neighborhood association has negotiated thus far. Since 2003, the association has raised concerns about the litter, traffic and noise that the arena will generate.

The multi-level arena will seat 12,500 people and take up nearly one city block near the corner of East 13th Avenue and Moss Street, on the east side of campus. The arena will cost approximately \$245 million and be paid for by a \$200 million taxable state bond, game revenue and investment returns from a \$100 million donation by Nike co-founder Phil Knight.

The arena has been controversial in Eugene since it was proposed in 2002. The project uses state money, and opponents worry that the arena may send the wrong message about the university's mission. The university has taken over several properties on Franklin Boulevard, including one through the power of eminent domain.

The neighborhood has taken a moderate approach to development of the arena and has never opposed the project itself. In recent years the association has favored what it calls "smart development," solutions that account for the needs of all parties involved.

Last month, the Fairmount Neighbors, the UO and the city signed a mitigation agreement designed to lessen the impacts of traffic, parking and litter associated with

the arena. The agreement covers many, though not all, of the concerns raised by the association and can be modified over time, said Jeff Nelson, chair of the Fairmount Neighbors arena committee. "It is a landmark agreement and only a few of its kind exist," he said. The agreement was reviewed as part of the university's CUP application.

"If done smartly, growth can be an opportunity rather than a liability," said Fairmount Neighbors co-chair Mark Gillem. "Rather than stick our head in the sand and say, 'Not in my backyard,' we have worked together to ensure that as growth happens, it will do so in a way that is complementary to our neighborhood."

move on our part, and it was by no means inexpensive," she said.

Fairmount is home to residents such as Alan Zelenka, Eugene city councilor, and Gillem, an architecture professor at the UO, who possess land-use policy knowledge. Specific expertise does help with navigating complex development proposals, Gillem said. But, he added, it is not as important as commitment and willingness to learn. "Neighbors have to be willing to spend the time if it's an issue that's important to them," he said.

The city is also a good resource for neighborhood associations, said Gillem. "Eugene is supportive of neighborhood-

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— MARK GILLEM, FAIRMOUNT NEIGHBORS CO-CHAIR


The Fairmount neighborhood has a few benefits working in its favor: residents who possess some expertise in land-use policy and traffic engineering and enough money to hire a land-use attorney.

The association gathered about \$10,000 in donations from Fairmount neighbors to cover fees for a land-use attorney during work on the arena issue, association co-chair Shelley Robertson said. "That was a smart

based involvement and has encouraged the ongoing organization of neighborhood associations across the city," he said.

According to Robertson, general neighborhood association meetings draw 30 to 80 people. She'd still like to see greater participation, she says. But she "feels fortunate to live in a neighborhood where the association seems to be in good shape." **EW**

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