

Scobert Park Revisited

Hot topic on neighborhood meeting agenda

Under towering trees in the heart of Eugene's Whiteaker neighborhood, Scobert Gardens is a "pocket" park on West 4th, just west of Blair Boulevard. Landscaping surrounds the open lawn on three sides. But recently several trees and numerous shrubs were removed, along with the table and benches in the shade.

The changes represent a "collaboration" between Eugene's parks operations and police department to increase visual clearance into the park "to discourage ongoing illicit activities." As this goes to press, the wrought iron fence may be re-aligned to change the northeast corner.

According to the city manager's office, "the problems of illicit activity, human waste and needles are significant problems at Scobert Park, but are growing problems throughout the park system." Not surprisingly, attempts to push problems out of downtown, Scobert and other parks result in the same problems surfacing elsewhere.

With this summer's resurgence of problems in and around Scobert Park, a handful of influential neighbors met with police, parks and OLCC. Then, following internal meetings of city staff, park modifications were announced – after work had begun.

However, "taking back the park" means different things to different people with different interests. There has been no genuine, broad-based neighborhood/city conversation aimed at resolving the many conflicting interests.

An example is the question of restrooms. While the city has something of a commitment to provide restrooms 24/7 in this area, finding a suitable location for portables after the Monroe Station closes will be difficult. Is Scobert Park an ideal location for restrooms, or a horrible location? Depends on your perspective.

But the planned realignment of the wrought iron fence removes a location that could well be used for portable restrooms. Will the city hold off on changing the fence until a restroom location is determined, or change the fence now to preclude restrooms there, or potentially realign the fence again later at extra expense?

A forum does exist where all neighbors have equal opportunity to participate, regardless of perspective. That forum is the city-recognized neighborhood association, Whiteaker Community Council (WCC).

"What's up with Scobert Park?!" is the topic of the WCC general meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 14, as announced on the city-funded postcard mailed to all neighborhood addresses in August. Everyone is welcome at this meeting, beginning at 7 pm, at the Whiteaker Community Center (corner of Clark and North Jackson).

One forum won't resolve the ongoing Scobert-area problems and conflicting interests, but it can be a new start – especially if neighbors with differing views choose to attend. For those not happy with WCC, come and help make it different.

Neighborhood-based resolution of differences and collaboration for safer parks is possible. It will not be easy nor come quickly. But it must include the neighborhood association – if the city still holds to its commitment to "Neighborhood Empowerment" of several years ago.

City staff informed WCC of the Scobert Park modifications after they were already decided and begun. Now parks operations needs to hold off on final changes, such as the configuration of the fence.

We've seen that difficult community collaborations won't be organized by the City, especially in these lean times. It's up to community and neighborhood groups to take the lead, together.

Majeska Seese-Green, former chair of WCC, co-founded ACT (A Community Together — Lane County), an independent nonprofit supporting capacity-building organizing and partnerships, across divides. Whiteaker ACT is on Facebook and at can be reached at 337-1643.



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