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— LYNNE FESSENDEN

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ENDS 10 YEARS AT WILLAMETTE FOOD AND FARM COALITION



Lynne Fessenden is stepping down from her decade-long position as the executive director of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition, a nonprofit focused on developing a sustainable food system in Lane County. But she says her passion for educating the community about local foods is still as strong as ever. “It’s been ten years, and that’s long enough,” she says.

Fessenden has a doctorate in oceanography from Oregon State University, is a self-taught nutritionist and says that while she enjoys gardening, “I mostly buy from local farmers because I like supporting them.”

Fessenden has done a lot more for local farmers than just buying her groceries from them. With Fessenden at the helm, the WFFC has helped develop the local food industry by convincing farmers that they can grow hard red wheat, which is ground into flour so that people can eat locally farmed wheat products.

Under Fessenden WFFC convinced schools to buy food from local farms with its Farm to School program.

WFFC also implemented a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program match program that has helped make local fresh food affordable to those who don’t have that much money to spend. SNAP beneficiaries who spend \$10 on food at the Lane County Farmers Market get an additional \$10 worth of “Food Bucks” to spend there on fruits and vegetables.

While attending OSU, Fessenden says she was more community-focused than her peers. “In graduate school I proposed a course to our dean that would teach grad students how to tell the general public why their research mattered, in three lines or less, and he laughed me out of the room.”

She later worked as the associate director of a national nonprofit, the Science and Environmental Health Network. “I loved the work but felt strange after a while that I was

helping communities all around the country but was not connected to what was going on in my own,” she says.

Since Fessenden’s sister was already an organic farmer, Fessenden was familiar with agriculture, and that influenced her decision to take the position at WFFC.

Fessenden is going to keep working with WFFC to publish the 2017 edition of the *Locally Grown Guide*, an informational booklet on local farmers and where to find their food.

She will also be working with the Willamette Valley Sustainable Foods Alliance to launch a regional foods brand. After that, she says, she won’t know until she gets there.

“Everyone eats. Everyone has a food story. That is what makes this work so powerful. There is no one who is not touched by food,” Fessenden says. “Working in support of our farmers and our food economy has been the most gratifying work of my life.” ■

## FUTURE OF EUGENE PARKS WILL BE CITY CLUB TOPIC

Lack of funding in recent years has led to cracked pavement, aging playground equipment that needs to be replaced and other maintenance needs in Eugene’s parks. City parks officials plan to bring this issue before the City Council as soon as March.

Next week, parks officials will present their ideas and take questions in a panel discussion at a meeting of the City Club of Eugene.

Eugene’s Parks and Open Space Division faces an annual \$2.3 million operational maintenance budget gap and a \$30 million capital backlog for developing and purchasing park land, city officials say.

Also on their list of needs is money to maintain 17 undeveloped parklands in southwest Eugene, Santa Clara, Bethel and Willakenzie.

The Parks and Recreation System Plan, also known as PARKS and RECreate, seeks to identify priorities for the next 10 to 20 years of parks and recreation in Eugene by addressing current problems, preparing for future population

growth and trends, and creating a vision to benefit current and future generations.

The plan includes funding the \$2.3 maintenance gap and developing one community park and five neighborhood parks in underserved areas within five years, according to a parks report.

At the City Club meeting, Parks and Open Space Planning Manager Carolyn Burke, Parks and Open Space Director Craig Carnagey and Recreation Services Manager Sandy Shaffer will present the Parks and Recreation System Plan to attendees.

Even with funding issues, Carnagey says his department can still take care of Eugene parks — but not at the level the public expects. “We’re not doing it at an adequate level to keep providing the quality of services the community has been expecting over the years, and it’s slowly starting to diminish,” Carnagey says.

Following through with funding the budget gap and backlog will require a majority vote from the City Council on a

proposed measure with a specific plan on how to fund park projects, he says. The most common funding methods are a voter approved property tax levy and bond measure (both funded through property taxes), Burke says.

A levy would cover the cost of daily park operations and maintenance, and a bond would fund capital projects, such as building a new community center.

If a measure were to pass both a bond and levy, this would cost the median homeowner \$64 a year (\$31 a year per household for the bond and \$33 per a household a year for a levy, which expires after 5 years), according to a report commissioned by the city from The Trust For Public Land.

The idea of the City Club presentation is for the public to feel informed enough about the Park and Recreation System Plan that they “can participate in the decision making process,” Burke says.

After the officials’ presentation at the meeting, there will be discussions among each table. Then City Club members can address officials with questions. Nonmembers can ask members to pose a question. ■

*The City Club meeting will begin at noon Friday, Feb. 3, at the University of Oregon’s Baker Center, 975 High Street. Admission is \$5 for nonCity Club members. Admission is free for City Club of Eugene members and students with student ID. Lunch is available for an extra charge. The meeting will also broadcast at 6:30 pm on Monday, Feb. 6, on KLCC 89.7 FM.*