

RIVERFRONT REVISIONS

UO's proposed plans for its North Campus cause contention

University of Oregon faculty members are asserting that administrators did not adequately consult them on plans to develop the university's riverfront.

Certain members of the UO Senate, a governing body comprised of mostly faculty, are alleging Campus Planning and Facilities administrators didn't provide a fair opportunity to give sufficient input on a university proposal to construct buildings, synthetic playing fields and flood lights on an area along the Willamette River and by the Frohnmayer Footbridge — where students and faculty have opposed development for three decades.

Allen Hancock is an alumnus who heads the Riverfront Restoration and Education group, a group advocating against the university's plans. "If you've got a piece of land that you know there have been lawsuits filed over, there have been protests, articles in papers and TV stories for decades," Hancock says, "it would make sense to really engage the campus community in a really meaningful way before moving forward."

Many faculty members bring classes to the riverfront for fieldwork. One of them is Bitty Roy, a UO biology professor. According to Roy's research, 3,624 students a year enroll in classes that involve coursework along the Willamette River.

Hancock says he envisions the riverfront expanding on its current use. And he is not encouraged by the synthetic turf playing fields, floodlights and buildings he sees presented in the project's plans.

"It could be held up as a place that is of great importance," Hancock says. "There could be signs about research projects, there could be urban agriculture, there could be all kinds of things happening there."

A History of Protest

The university's past attempts to develop the area that is being called North Campus have been met with resistance since the mid-'80s, according to a University Senate report on past opposition to riverfront development.

In 1989, when the city granted the university a conditional use permit to construct office buildings and parking garages along the Willamette River, the report says a professor appealed the county's permit to the Oregon Supreme Court.

In 1997, 200 students held a rally at the EMU student union building against a university proposal to build an automobile underpass at the northern tip of Agate Street, according to the report. The report states that, in 2009, when the university tried to extend its conditional use permit granted in 1989, more than 600 public comments were filed opposing the plan.

Now a portion of the campus community is once again in contention over the area after campus planners submitted another conditional use permit to the city of Eugene on Feb. 26. Some faculty members say they are discontent with the fact that the plan involves erecting buildings over

year, campus planners held events at the Ford Alumni Center, where community members were invited to give input on the proposal as it was being drafted.

Eng also says her team discussed the plan with members of the Campus Planning Committee, an appointed group made up of mostly teaching faculty, during three meetings from 2017-18.

During the third discussion on Nov. 28, the committee voted to recommend that UO President Michael Schill approve the plan.

But Roy, who sat on the campus Planning Commission, was the lone vote against it. She feels she had little say in what went into the proposals. During meetings with campus planners, Roy said they were presented with plans, but were very limited in what they could change or get rid of.

Some faculty members say they are discontent with the fact that the plan involves erecting buildings over the riverfront, located north of the train tracks that cross bike paths leading to Frohnmayer Footbridge.

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Campus planners say the expansion into North Campus is necessary, as the university factors in how to accommodate enrollment growth.

"It ensures that the university has flexibility," UO senior planner Emily Eng says. "We have limited holdings. This represents 25 percent of our campus — 77 acres of a 300-acre campus. And there may be certain uses that are desirable up there."

But some faculty members — like Roy, the biology professor who teaches classes by the riverfront — say they fear the plan's flexibility could cause the administration to build whatever they choose.

"If we are going to treat this land as it should be, the crown jewel of the University of Oregon, then we should be paying attention to what goes there," Roy says. "If it's a blank slate, they could put anything they wanted."

Faculty Inclusion?

Eng says faculty input was included in the North Campus process. In November 2017 as well as January of this

"The campus planning committee was presented with plans from the very start with playing fields in them, and we never knew where they came from or why there was no opportunity for there to be none," she says.

In addition, the UO biology professor was dissatisfied with the timings of campus planning committee meetings. Roy said the two sessions held at the Ford Alumni Center occurred during the first and last weeks of term. She said campus planning committee meetings also occurred during the summer when faculty members weren't on campus.

And finally, the Nov. 28 meeting, where they sent the plan for Schill's approval, was held on the last week of term, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Roy said.

By the next Senate meeting on Feb. 26, the administration had gone ahead and sent a conditional permit use to the city.

But, according to Greg Bryant, a university senator, campus community members opposing the plan are not giving up. On March 14, the university Senate approved a motion to request that the administration withdraw areas north of the railroad track from its conditional use permit to the city. ■

SLANT

- Eugene has chosen a new police chief. **Chris Skinner, currently chief in Richland, Wash.**, will take over Eugene Police Department on April 30, replacing Pete Kerns. He'll lead a department with 190 sworn officers and another 140 civilian employees, with a budget of some \$50 million. Skinner has the support of the police union and, so far, says the right things about such acute local problems as homelessness. We wish him well in his new job.

- Former City Councilor George Brown tells us he

is optimistic about the prospects for an **elected independent auditor for Eugene** after knocking on doors across the city. Residents understand the difference between the elected auditor Measure 20-283 and "auditor lite," which says the council should choose the auditor, according to Brown. With the vote in May, 20-283 advocates are lining up supporters such as former council members David Kelly and Shawn Boles, former city manager Vicki Elmer and others who understand how city government works.

- Even if basketball bores you, take a look at the **Oregon women's team now in the Sweet 16 run** for the national championship. They play Saturday afternoon, March 24, on ESPN2 and could go on to the Elite Eight. This collection of top athletes — they're from Spain, Germany, Australia, even Fairbanks, Alaska — has so much fun that it's contagious. Coach Kelly Graves is

not yelling at his players, nor parading up and down the sidelines. It's only a game, part of March Madness.

- As we head toward the next wildfire season, the City Club of Eugene meeting March 16 got an important heads-up from speakers Tracy Beck, supervisor of the Willamette National Forest; Randy Green, expert in fire suppression since 1977; and Craig Patterson, McKenzie Bridge resident who studies what to do about wildfires. **Last year was the most expensive fire-fighting year on record in Oregon**, and Beck says the current fiscal path is not sustainable. Oregon experienced 1,069 reported wildfires that burned a total of 451,863 acres. Green suggested landowners check out Firewise, the website [Google it] that tells you what to do. We suggest that we should also join the fight against extreme climate change and the role it plays in burning up our Oregon forests.