

Enthusiasm grows for Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park – ideas sought

By Scott Laird

About 15 interested people attended an informational meeting about the proposed Bicycle Skills Park, January 23, at Vernonia City Hall. Most of those attending were already involved in the project, but some citizens came out to learn for the first time what all the buzz is about; two even came from Forest Grove.

The presentation included some history about the project; a power point slide presentation explaining the project's goals, timetable, and update; and a question and answer session.

Those unfamiliar with the Bicycle Skills Park Project learned that the idea for constructing a local recreation-themed bicycle park started about three years ago, with a presentation to the Vernonia City Council. The presentation proposed using some of the city property at the old Mill Site, near Vernonia Lake, to build a

facility that could be used by citizens of all skill levels and, especially, to provide an activity for Vernonia's youth.

This type of recreation center would also hold potential for drawing visitors to Vernonia. The City Council was very impressed with the presentation and hoped to pursue it further.

The visit to Vernonia by Cycle Oregon, the following summer, created more interest in the idea. Other developments, including the imminent opening of L.L. "Stub" Stewart State Park (which will include mountain bike trails), and the announcement that the Crown-Zellerbach Trail from Vernonia to Scappoose will become a reality, created more interest in the idea of developing the Mill Site as a Mountain Bike Skills Park.

A group of interested citizens finally came together, and with the support of the Chamber of Commerce, the Vernonia Parks Committee, and the City Council,

beginning to raise funds and develop an initial master plan for the site.

A key component for the creation of this project has been the inclusion of Ric Balfour from Forest Grove. Balfour, who is a consultant specializing in planning, design and training in natural resource recreation, has been interested in helping Vernonia develop this project from the very beginning. This past fall, the City of Vernonia contracted with Balfour, using funds from the Chamber of Commerce and the Parks Committee, to act as project manager for development of the initial Master Plan and to help with fund raising.

An avid mountain biker himself, Balfour has worked as a consultant for the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) on trail design and management, for the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Forest Resources Institute developing recreation, education, training and interpretive plans and programs. In addition to the Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park, he is working with the Tualatin River Watershed Council, Friends of Forest Park in Portland, Greenway Group, Northwest Service Academy, and Oregon Parks and Recreation. Balfour has a graduate degree in Forest Recreation Resource Management from Oregon State University and serves on the Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Council. Vernonia is very lucky to have secured the services of someone as knowledgeable, talented and well-connected as Ric Balfour for this project.



Multiple goals for the project including the following:

- Spurring economic development;
- Promoting development of the mill site property;
- Providing safe and healthy activities for residents and visitors;
- Developing a "brand" strategy for the the City of Vernonia, with Bicycle Recreation as the main focus.

The public meeting was held to gather citizen input and ideas about what they would like to see happen with the design of the park. Current ideas include a BMX bike track, a Pump Park track (a new way for riders to develop skills without pedaling), and a skills trail that would incorporate numerous obstacles for people of different skill levels to practice on before going out on real downhill mountain bike trails. Also under consideration as part of the project are rest room facilities, an informational kiosk, directional signage around town, a bike washing station, vehicle

parking, historical interpretive signage about the mill site, a mechanics station, and connector trails to town and other area trails.

Successful parks of this type have been developed, or are being developed, at Whistler Ski Resort in British Columbia, Canada; in Seattle, Washington; and, closer to home, at Black Rock near Salem. The meeting generated much enthusiasm for the project, especially from local business owners. Ideas were shared about ways to publicize the project, and to create additional support among local citizens. Another presentation is scheduled on February 8 for students at Vernonia High School.

The project will require funding almost exclusively through grant money. Large amounts of old construction material still at the mill site, will be used in building most parts of the proposed tracks and trails. The completion of the park will require considerable volunteer time and labor for both the actual construction and the organizational ground work. Planning is underway to begin construction this spring and continue in the summer.

The next public meeting on this project will be held February 8, at 6:30 p.m. at Vernonia City Hall, 1001 Bridge St. There will be a presentation, followed by a question and answer period, then ideas for the project will be solicited. If you would like to get involved, need more information or would like to be kept informed of the Park's progress, call the Chamber of Commerce, at 503-429-6081.

Super Quiet, Portable Power



EU2000i

- 2000 Watts (16.7A) of Honda Inverter 120V AC Power
- Eco-Throttle™ - Runs Up to 15 Hours on 1 gal. of Fuel
- Advanced Inverter Technology Provides Reliable Power to Computers and Other Sensitive Equipment
- Power for Microwave, Refrigerators, Hair Dryers and Small AC Units



Forest Grove Honda
3619 Pacific Ave.,
Forest Grove, OR
887-500-7300 or 503-357-7300

