

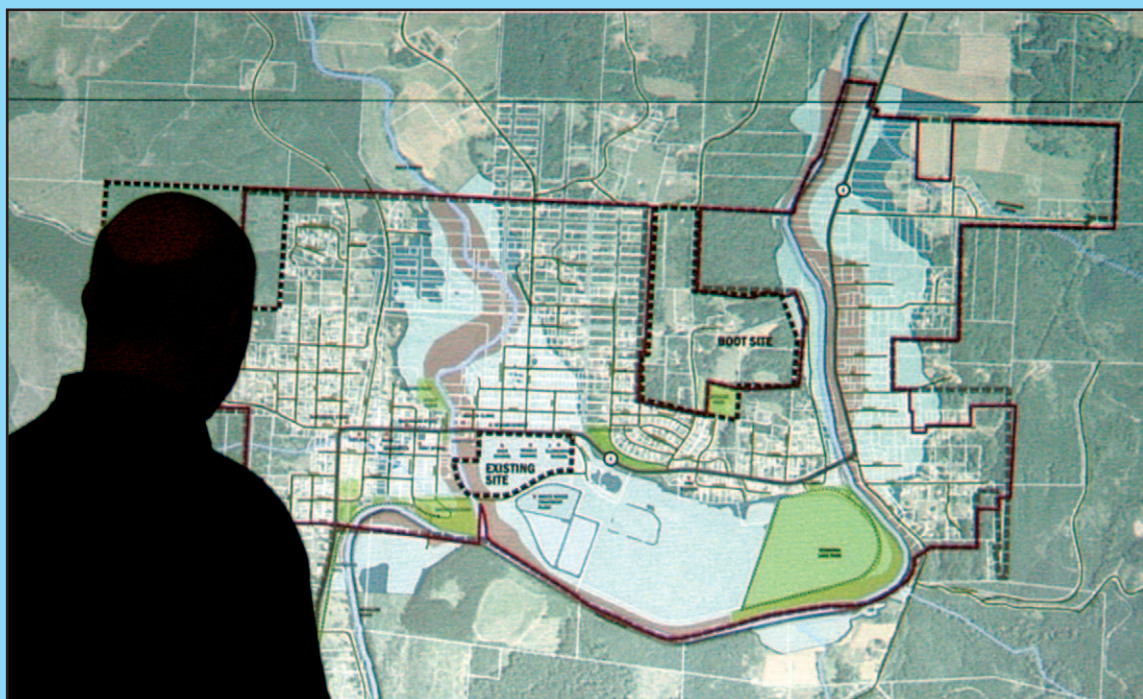
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School Site Preview



Vernonia Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson presented a summary report on possible school sites, at the last Vernonia School Board meeting.

School site comparison previewed at school board meeting

After two major floods in 12 years, there are few people in the Vernonia School District who would argue against the need to move the schools out of the flood plain. The district spent about \$1.5 million to clean up after the December, 2007, flood and another \$3.5 million to repair schools that will flood again.

As the district tried to figure out what could be done, Governor Ted Kulongoski appointed an Oregon Solutions Team, professionals in every area that would apply to the situation, to help with the process.

While the Solutions Team worked on an in-depth study of how, when and where a new school could be built, a District Facilities Committee studied what creates schools that work better for students. They also visited other schools, looking for design elements that promote learning.

The Facilities Committee

has completed this phase of their task and will meet again when an architectural firm is selected to help guide further efforts.

Meanwhile, the Oregon Solutions School Siting Committee completed their in-depth review of several potential school sites, narrowed it to three final sites and is tentatively recommending one of them.

A summary of their School Siting Comparison Report was presented at the February 12 meeting of the Vernonia School Board by Vernonia Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson. Johnson, school district superintendent Dr. Kenneth Cox and Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde, a Vernonia resident, also serve on the Solutions Team.

The Siting Report identified the three sites as the Existing Site, where the schools are now located; the Northwest Corner Site, north of Bridge

Street and Cater Hill, and west of Rose Avenue; and the Boot Site, at the end of Missouri and Texas Avenues, north of Spencer Field. The Boot Site is the preferred site for the following reasons:

- It is outside the floodplain,
- Is closer to the city center than the NW Corner Site,
- Utility extension and road construction are both easier and less costly than the NW Corner Site,
- Land use approval is easier and will happen more quickly than the NW Corner Site,
- Is close to existing and proposed residential uses, and
- Use of Spencer Park as part of the campus provides benefits.

The Summary Report also included brief reviews of technical reports and financial issues and some of the next steps.

Spirited discussion took place regarding costs, which are likely to be in the \$50 mil-

Vernonia project included in Governor's bid for stimulus funds

Governor Ted Kulongoski sees green when he looks at the three projects that top his stimulus dream package, and there is no envy involved. The Governor's vision is "green", as in sustainable, and his announcement that Vernonia's major problems – flood damaged schools, water treatment plant and wastewater treatment facility – have been combined as one of those projects, was a shot in the arm for local advocates.

While always hopeful, Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde put aside his usual "we'd better just wait and see" demeanor at last week's school board meeting, obviously excited at the potential for Vernonia.

In his announcement, Kulongoski said that he will seek

hundreds of millions of federal stimulus dollars to rebuild Vernonia schools using sustainable techniques such as energy efficient construction, stored rainwater and recycled materials, as well as environmentally sustainable methods for rebuilding the town's water and wastewater systems.

In addition to the Vernonia project, the two other targeted projects are the construction and installation of solar-panel lights for Oregon highways, which would be the first solar-lighted highway system in the nation, and construction of the nation's most sustainable and energy efficient prison in Junction City.

The governor has also announced the creation of a public-private federal recovery plan advisory group that will focus on leveraging competitive grant dollars to advance Oregon's economic recovery efforts, particularly around green and sustainable investments.

The Oregon Way Advisory Group will include representatives from both public and private sectors who can provide expertise and ideas for integrating innovation in developing Oregon Way project proposals.

See photo on page 24

Vernonia School siting is topic of Town Hall Meeting

There will be a public meeting on Monday, March 2, at 7:00 p.m. with information on a siting decision for Vernonia public schools. The meeting will be held in the Vernonia Middle School cafeteria. This will be the Vernonia School Board's opportunity to take public input on the site selection.

lion range, siting and more. The greatest concern about costs was practical: "Where would the money come from?"

The project will almost certainly include a local bond, but Hyde was excited to tell about the press conference held by Governor Kulongoski, where the governor announced that he had picked Vernonia schools as one of three pilot programs for special attention. According to Hyde, in addition to concentrating on funding possibilities, the governor wants to use the project to demonstrate environmentally sound construction methods.

"This is exciting," Hyde said, because it will attract architects and other construction professionals, plus foundations and other funding resources, who want to get involved in a pilot project of this sort.

Others were more restrained, especially considering

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