

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD
WORK SESSION
EWEB BOARD ROOM
500 EAST 4TH AVENUE
JANUARY 5, 2010
5:30 P.M.

Commissioners Present: John Brown, Vice President; Bob Cassidy, Rich Cunningham, Joann Ernst.

Commissioners Absent: Ron Farmer, President.

Others Present: Randy Berggren, Debra Smith, Sheila Crawford, Lance Robertson, Jim Wiley, Clay Norris, Tom Buckhouse, Jeannine Parisi, Terry Bequette, Mark Oberle, Joe Harwood, Wendi Schulz-Kerns, Mark Freeman, and Judy Chase of the EWEB staff; Lori Nelson, John Rowell, Community Advisory Team; Ruth Atcherson, City of Eugene minutes recorder.

Vice President Brown convened the work session of the Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB).

Community Advisory Team Concepts, Comments, & Design

Mark Oberle, Property Manager, introduced Lori Nelson, who had been involved in the project, and John Rowell, of Rowell Brokaw Architects. He explained that they would be briefing the Board on the Riverfront Master Plan process thus far and what lay ahead. He noted that the last big public event had been held on November 30 and had been one of the most well-attended public events that EWEB had held. He had been very impressed at the level of public engagement in the planning process.

Commissioner Ernst arrived.

Mr. Rowell walked the Board through the three options. He stated that they wanted to bring three scenarios that they considered to be feasible. Option 1 was called "City Green." He related that people had expressed an attachment to some of the existing buildings. He said this option suggested that some of the elements could be retained so that there could be a museum or a public activity within a park-like space. He said they had talked about creating a connection from the city to the river, with an open space on the river and a redeveloped bicycle path including overlooks and a strong riparian zone.

Mr. Rowell related that people had expressed an interest in having another bridge and a more walkable loop. He said the bridge featured in the 1st and 3rd option aligned with 8th Avenue and created a connection between the downtown and major open space. He pointed to a blue line on Option 1 and explained that this was a suggested Mill Race element.

Mr. Rowell discussed Option 2, called "Organic Plaza," which would include a more passive approach to the river's edge. He said a street would meander through the option, with

development blocks to the south and the west and the developed bicycle path. He noted that this option would allow some flooding to occur, which would allow more natural vegetation to exist within the site. He stated that the first two options showed access to the site occurring from 8th Avenue and from 5th Avenue and High Street.

Continuing, Mr. Rowell highlighted Option 3, called "River Bow." He said they began with the idea of taking the sweep of the river and then making a "grand gesture" of open space that followed the sweep. He related that the option would also bring the public to the river by bringing the street to the edge of the open space. He related that the option would allow for larger development blocks.

Commissioner Cunningham asked what the economic impact of each option would be. Mr. Rowell replied that it varied with the amount of developable land. He added that each of the options was deemed feasible, within what they knew about the development context of the community.

Vice President Brown asked how much additional open space each plan envisioned. Mr. Rowell responded that the easements did not change between the scenarios. Mr. Oberle said a great number of the open spaces and road placements had been designed to take advantage of the undevelopable areas that had utilities in them.

Vice President Brown expressed reservations about the concept of a bridge. He asked if they envisioned such a conceptualization as becoming a mandate in the Master Plan that a developer would have to initiate to get development approval. He observed that an additional crossing over the tracks would be a "huge financial undertaking." Mr. Rowell replied that this was a good question. He said they showed the bridge because it acknowledged the strong community support for it, but they could write the Master Plan and illustrate it in a way that made clear what was in the proposal of a Master Plan and what entitlements that it would build in without mandating a particular element of it.

Vice President Brown stressed the importance of maximizing the value of the property. He added that if the community wanted to pay for a bridge, it could, but EWEB should not have to pay for it.

In response to a question from Commissioner Ernst, Community and Local Government Outreach Coordinator Jeannine Parisi underscored that they were looking at a 50-year vision. She said some of the elements were illustrative of the future vision; the Master Plan would allow for them to happen if funding could be found. She stated that the elements would not be required.

Commissioner Cassidy asked if a greenway development permit would be needed for the property. Ms. Parisi replied that the city had told them that EWEB should come forward with a Master Plan for what was believed to be the best option for development of the site and then the city would take that option and figure out what kind of regulations and requirements it would have to adhere to. She added that they were communicating with the city so that they would not engage in planning for something that could not be done on the property.

Commissioner Cunningham asked if anyone had considered establishment of a fishing pier. Ms. Parisi responded that they had.

Commissioner Cunningham asked if the Community Advisory Team (CAT) had indicated a favorite option. Ms. Parisi replied that they had asked the CAT not to pick one option, because what would come before the public and the Board in February would be the best elements of all of the options.

Vice President Brown asked if they had done the research to determine whether the University's easement would be voided if they discontinued pumping water through the Mill Race. Mr. Rowell replied that the pipe he was referring to served more than the Mill Race. Mr. Oberle added that the answer to that question was not within the scope of the CAT's project, though those were good points. He stressed that they were trying to present a plan that said what site would be the best one to put the water through if there was water available.

Ms. Parisi shared some of the public input they had heard. She related that accessibility had been of key importance to people and that private ownership should not preclude public access. She noted that the need for safety and lighting had been brought up, along with the need for balance and the desire not to over-light the area or to have too much vegetation and trees. She said they had also heard a strong objection to a large area of paved parking from many people.

Vice President Brown wanted to ensure that they were aware of a balance. He did not want to make the same mistakes that the community had made with the downtown, which was to try to embrace and engage everyone in a process which then resulted in something that was chaotic and that no one wanted to go to because it was too dangerous. Ms. Parisi responded that people did have to think about a day and evening use schematic.

Commissioner Cunningham noted that he had been hearing questions from a more elderly population, who wanted an opportunity to give input. He offered to hold a town hall discussion.

Ms. Parisi stated that two events were coming up – a Rotary Club event at Delta and one in the downtown area.

Mr. Oberle related that the CAT had taken a field trip to the waterfronts in Corvallis and Portland. He shared some slides of the waterfronts taken on the trip.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham, Mr. Oberle stated that they were on track to bring a draft plan back to the Board in May or June, 2010. He was not certain when it would be presented before the City Council as there was a lot of land use work that had to precede that, such as potential MetroPlan amendments and rezoning. He said the Board also needed to decide what portions of the property should be sold and what should be kept so that they could initiate the lot line adjustments.

Commissioner Ernst asked if any potential buyers had come forward. Mr. Oberle replied that a few had come forward and he had encouraged them to be involved in the process.

In response to a follow-up question from Commissioner Ernst, Mr. Oberle said they had heard people in the development community express concerns that too many restrictions would be placed on the property. He stressed that they were not far enough in the process to know whether or not there would be restrictions, but some of the development community had been clear that if there were onerous restrictions, the property would not be very developable.

Vice President Brown understood that EWEB had not declared the property surplus at this point and when it did, the city had the first right of refusal, which meant it had 30 days to declare an interest in the property and five years to consummate a transaction. He asked if it would be premature to begin the conversation with the city. Mr. Oberle responded that EWEB was required to do the Master Plan regardless. He understood, from conversations with Planning and Development Department (PDD) staff, that the city's interest in the Master Plan was to ensure there was a good public process. He interpreted this to mean that if EWEB declared the property surplus in the present, it would force the city to say it was interested in it. He believed that if they finished the process and produced a plan that the city would endorse, the city could be interested in a portion of the property. Vice President Brown indicated his objection to letting the city "pick the plum out of the pie."

Ms. Parisi stated that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) included a recommendation about phasing. She predicted that they would bring a proposal back to the Board on this. She said the determination of what the best strategy should be in terms of economic value and future development would be some hard work for the Board. Regarding the possibility of approaching the city in the present, she said if they thought they could get a direct, straight answer that would hold they would probably start the conversation. She did not sense that the city was ready at this point.

Commissioner Cassidy asked if EWEB staff was talking to the staff of the University of Oregon regarding the property. Mr. Oberle replied that he had not heard of any such discussions, adding that the University did not have a first right of refusal. Ms. Parisi noted that representatives from the University had attended all of the public input events.

Mr. Rowell presented a fourth concept, which sought to take the aspects most liked by the people and compile them into one option. He said it would include a varied setback, which sought to honor the character and ecological function of the river while allowing people to also be close to the river. He related that they had heard a preference for a simple route through the site and the "elegance" of the curve of the river's bow had "struck a chord" with people. He stated that, from subsequent research, it seemed an 8th Avenue crossing had been a direction they "should go" and that would follow the river and meet with 5th Avenue. He said the option would offer both taller and smaller buildings and would integrate the steam plant. He felt it reflected some of the strategies that had arisen from the feedback from the three themes. He added that they had not wanted to "flatten" all of the buildings, but the CAT had also indicated that they did not want a building to get in the way of what would be the best framework. He touched on the possible bridge connection. He felt it would be a nice way to enter the site. He said the Mill Race would be proposed to run along 8th Avenue, adding that it was not a promise or a requirement to do a Mill Race.

Commissioner Cassidy asked what defined the official setback from the river. Mr. Rowell replied that they continued to discuss what the actual requirements were. He said they had been told that it appeared that there were no setbacks required on the site because it was developed before that requirement had been put into place. He stated that 100 feet back from the present top of bank was the line that was currently considered to be the appropriate setback.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham, Vice President Brown stated that the depth of the river ranged from approximately one foot to six to eight feet deep.

Commissioner Cunningham asked if anyone had suggested the potential idea of building a casino there. Mr. Oberle responded that the CAT had not delved into specific uses, beyond exploring what ratios of commercial and residential use made sense. Commissioner Cunningham stressed that he was not advocating for such a use; he thought it should be one among many ideas to be considered.

In response to a question from Vice President Brown, Mr. Oberle stated that EWEB had vacated 4th Avenue and was no longer platted as a right of way.

Commissioner Ernst thanked them for all of their work. She remarked that she did not want any cars driving along the river.

Commissioner Cunningham said he wanted to see the citizens get the “best bang for the buck” for the property. Mr. Oberle assured him that they were striving to do that.

Vice President Brown had been very impressed with what they were getting for what was being spent.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cassidy, Mr. Oberle assured him that they would do what they could in regard to the open space. He said the open space did take away from developable land but it also drew people if it was done right.

In closing, Mr. Oberle wanted to acknowledge the work the consulting team was doing and express appreciation for it. He also wanted to publicly appreciate the CAT. He noted that in the beginning they had predicted that the process would take one year and now it had been two. He introduced some of the members of the CAT who were in the audience.

Vice President Brown adjourned the work session at 6:42 p.m.

Assistant Secretary

President