



CHRIS PIETSCH / The Register-Guard

A master plan is being formulated for nearly 20 of 27 acres at EWEB's riverfront site.

EWEB, city favor riverfront process

BY JEFF WRIGHT
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Agreement on how to redevelop a choice piece of riverfront property inched closer Wednesday at a joint meeting of the Eugene City Council and Eugene Water & Electric Board.

City councilors voted 8-0 to support an EWEB proposal on how to develop a master plan for nearly 20 of the 27 acres at EWEB's riverfront site, which the utility hopes to sell so

it can move its operations division to west Eugene.

The city had earlier suggested that it take a lead role in developing the master plan, and tensions were high over whether the city and EWEB could agree on a planning process. But those concerns largely dissolved after the city attorney reminded the council that its role needs to be limited — because ultimately councilors will be asked to make quasi-judicial

*Please turn to **EWEB**, Page D3*

EWEB: Seeking to maximize value of land

Continued from Page D1

decisions on the property's master plan and related land use requests.

Under EWEB's proposal, the utility will put together a citizen advisory team and hire a consultant to help it develop a master plan. EWEB also proposes at least four open houses to hear the public's ideas.

Councilor Alan Zelenka asked that the council help decide whom to appoint to the advisory team and as consultant — ideas that EWEB staff and commissioners seemed to support. Such participation would not violate the council's need to avoid content decisions related to the master plan, City Attorney Glenn Klein said.

The council's vote directs city and EWEB staff to draft a "memo of understanding" that will detail the process, with the memo to be discussed at a subsequent joint meeting of the

council and utility board.

Councilors and utility commissioners said they are mindful of the public's expectation that they collaborate on the project. "People expect us to work together," Councilor Mike Clark said. "If we can't be legally married, then maybe we need a domestic partnership so we can live well together."

Councilor Andrea Ortiz said the parcel's future is too important to leave to one public body to decide. "I'd hate to have it go the highest bidder, and someone puts a hotel on it," she said.

The city's downtown plan sets several criteria for any redevelopment of the EWEB property, including that it feature a "people place" and an educational aspect, and that setbacks and design techniques be used to address environmental concerns.

Under city law, if EWEB declares the riverfront property to be surplus, the city has first

crack at buying it. If the city does so, but can't reach a price agreement within five years, EWEB would be free to sell it to another party.

Utility board President Mel Menegat said EWEB wants to maximize the value of any acreage it sells while remaining consistent with the downtown plan. The utility plans to apply any sale proceeds to the cost of moving its operations division to Roosevelt Boulevard in west Eugene, and it isn't likely to declare the property surplus until financing for that move is complete, he said.

Councilor Bonny Bettman urged EWEB commissioners to

regard the parcel as more than what it can command on the market. "It's a resource to be managed for the public good — it's not something that 'belongs to EWEB,'" she said.

EWEB Commissioner Patrick Lanning said the utility does take a broader view of the property's worth.

"It's not just the bottom-line dollars but how it affects our community," he said.