

PANEL RECOMMENDS RIVERFRONT CONSULTANT ROWELL BROKAW WOULD ASSIST IN PLANNING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF 18 ACRES NEAR THE EWEB OFFICES, IF THE BOARD APPROVES

By Susan Palmer, The Register-Guard, *Mar 18, 2009, page B4*

After six weeks of painstaking deliberations, a volunteer group crafting a development plan for about 18 acres on the Willamette River has recommended Rowell Brokaw Architects as lead consultants on the project.

The Community Advisory Team working on the Riverfront Master Plan for the Eugene Water & Electric Board previously had named the Eugene architects as their top choice after putting out a request for qualifications last fall, then choosing Rowell Brokaw in January from among the 15 consulting groups that applied.

Rowell Brokaw brought together a range of experts from engineers and transportation advisers to biologists and landscape designers. The advisory team said it liked Rowell Brokaw for its local experience as well as for the national consultants it had lined up to help.

But during the process of negotiating a contract, the scope of the project grew, and Rowell Brokaw's initial estimate jumped from \$385,000 to \$591,000. EWEB staff members wanted more time with the engineering consultant and some advisory team members wanted the nationally known designers to play a bigger role. The resulting increases raised questions for some team members and challenges for Rowell Brokaw, which was then asked to rein in costs.

But on Tuesday, the advisory team, working by consensus rather than majority vote, decided to endorse Rowell Brokaw's higher fee. The committee instructed EWEB staff to write a contract with several cost-control measures that will allow EWEB to assess the project at various steps in the process, and even cancel the contract if they're unhappy with the progress.

The volunteer team doesn't have the power to hire the consultants, only to make a recommendation to the utility's board. EWEB commissioners will decide on the selection in late April.

About two-thirds of EWEB's 27 riverfront acres will be available for development in 2010 after the publicly owned utility moves its operations to a new center being built on Roosevelt Boulevard in west Eugene. EWEB's administrative work will continue to be done at its riverside headquarters east of downtown.

City planning guidelines require both mixed-use development and open space at the riverfront property, but there are no specific limits on the amount of open space or what kind of mixed use should be considered. That's the charge of the advisory team, which will schedule at least four public sessions as it comes up with a design.

After wrestling with costs, the team rejected some of the scaled-back options offered by Rowell Brokaw.

"I'm not going out to the community and saying we reduced the scope," team member Dean Papé said.

It's not unusual for cost estimates to go up during contract negotiations, EWEB project manager Mark Oberle said.

While the Riverfront Master Plan process is unique, the utility went through a similar process when it hired consultants to design the Roosevelt maintenance and operations center. The cost for that project grew as details of the project became more clear, Oberle said.

EWEB's waterfront land represents opportunities for the city and challenges for the utility, which wants to sell the land next to its downtown headquarters to help cover the cost of the Roosevelt complex.

The land is specifically noted in the city's Downtown Plan, which requires that EWEB create a "people place" that is active, vibrant, accessible and multiuse; that it incorporate environmental concerns in its building and site design; and that it include an educational aspect that informs visitors about the river, the city and the area's history.

While getting to an agreement took much longer than she expected, team member Desiree Moore said afterward that she is satisfied with the decision.

"I feel good, confident," she said. "I feel like the details we hammered out, the checkpoints in the phases will work well. ... This process hasn't been easy, but it has been worthwhile."

Oberle said he doesn't expect the selection delay to cause problems.

EWEB won't put the riverfront property up for sale until construction at the Roosevelt site is completed late next year.