
EWEB begins reflecting on riverfront | The utility wants to sell some of its 27 acres along the Willamette to pay for a move to west Eugene

By [Susan Palmer](#), The Register-Guard, Sep 16, 2009

Imagine the riverside steam plant as a brew pub or the barrel vault warehouse as a public market. Picture the equipment repair building as a museum. Or how about an incubator space for entrepreneurial start-ups?

The brainstorming for the Eugene Water & Electric Board's riverfront master plan has officially begun.

On Tuesday, EWEB commissioners got a first look at the development possibilities for their 27 acres along the Willamette River. The utility is moving its maintenance and operations divisions to west Eugene and will sell at least some of its prime real estate to help finance the move.

A community advisory team, all volunteers and selected jointly by EWEB commissioners and Eugene city councilors, has been meeting for the past year to come up with a vision.

Local architectural firm Rowell Brokaw has been hired as consultants to help shape both the public involvement process and the ultimate design proposal.

While planning meetings have been open to the public all along, community members will get their chance to be part of the process on Sept. 30 when the first of four public meetings is held. The utility recommends that people interested in participating sign up in advance.

On Tuesday, community and local outreach coordinator Jeannine Parisi outlined the first brush strokes for the directions development could go. She cautioned commissioners that the ideas are more test cases meant to assure that the master plan is flexible rather than actual design options already on the table.

The simplest of five proposals would remodel existing structures for other uses, from office space to restaurants.

Under a housing-focused scenario, the riverfront property could accommodate apartments, townhouses, senior housing, assisted living and student housing, with some limited retail and open space for parks, plazas and trails.

A more civic-oriented option would put City Hall at the site with a museum, performing arts space and even some educational buildings to accommodate Lane Community College and University of Oregon programs.

The land and buildings could also be used to create a hub for sustainable businesses, attracting similar industries that buy into a specialized marketing strategy. With involvement from the university, start-ups would receive technical and management support.

Or the place could become a mix of all the above, with housing, restaurants and retail, office space and even a boutique hotel close to the river.

Commissioners worried that people attending the public meetings might assume that a lack of a specific proposal means anything is possible. The fact is, development on the riverfront has to help pay for construction of the new facility in west Eugene, said board President Ron Farmer.

"If you say you want a waterfront park here, people will say, 'Yes,'" Farmer said. "If we add \$500 to your EWEB bill, the answer is, 'No.'"

Riverfront planning, Upcoming public meetings include:

Sept 30: 6 p.m., EWEB North Building, 500 E. Fourth Ave. Site tour begins at 6 p.m. Presentation and discussion from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. To register, visit eugeneriverfront.com, or e-mail eweb@rowellbrokaw.com.

Oct. 3: Design charrette sponsored by Southern Oregon chapter of the American Institute for Architects; location and time not yet determined

Nov. 10: Public meeting, 6 p.m., North Building