

The Register-Guard

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Future of EWEB's past |**Charting a course for the utility's riverfront land will take months****BY REBECCA WOOLINGTON***The Register-Guard*Posted to Web: **Wednesday, Sep 30, 2009 10:40PM**Appeared in print: **Thursday, Oct 1, 2009, page B3**

Tricia Raines envisions Eugene's riverfront as a park, with rich, lush greenery. Except for the Eugene Water & Electric Board's steam plant, she wants the asphalt and buildings gone.

"It's an incredibly beautiful area that I want everyone to enjoy — not just a few," said Raines, a lifetime Eugene resident who owns a consulting business.

Bob Hart, on the other hand, said he would like to see recognition of the old Eugene Millrace, which runs beneath the property, incorporated into any riverfront design.

"The Millrace is such an important part of the industrial history of the city," said Hart, executive director of the Lane County Historical Society.

Raines and Hart were among about 85 residents who participated in EWEB's public tour of its riverfront property on Wednesday. Groups of 20 toured the EWEB site and afterward listened to a presentation and participated in a discussion about riverfront possibilities.

EWEB will vacate much of its 27-acre property along the Willamette River after a new, \$84 million operations center opens off Roosevelt Boulevard in west Eugene in November 2010. The operations and maintenance staff will relocate to the new site, while EWEB's administrative and customer service staff will remain at the riverfront property.

Before any of the roughly 15 acres of vacated property are sold, EWEB, city officials and a nine-member community advisory team must create a master plan for riverfront development. Wednesday's tour was part of the utility's effort to engage the public in the planning process.

The plan is set to be finished by next summer, with the goal of creating a "people place" focused around the theme of connecting people to one another, to surrounding downtown areas and to the Willamette River, said Mark Oberle, EWEB project manager.

“Right now, this property is isolated,” he said. “We can physically connect this property to downtown.”

EWEB officials said much public interest lies in preserving the utility’s steam plant, which was built in the 1930s with additions in the 1940s and ’50s, as a historical building. The cream colored building with light turquoise-trimmed windows boasts a massive interior — one complete with giant generators reminiscent of early industry. EWEB hopes to get out of the steam business by 2012, Oberle said.

Gaylene Carpenter, an arts and administration professor at the University of Oregon, said she saw several old-industry buildings converted to art cooperatives in Australia and sees the steam plant becoming an artist’s haven.

“In Australia, there were garage bands practicing and artists working in there at once,” she said.

But taking one step into the plant, Carpenter realized the place would need some revamping. “This doesn’t look like an art center; I feel like I am in a ship,” she said.

Tom Snyder, who makes museum dioramas, has different ideas about the plant. Snyder said he visualizes the plant, and the entire site, as a museum.

Upon entering a warehouse on the property, Snyder enthusiastically said, “Ah, this is delicious.”

In May, EWEB contracted with Rowell Brokaw Architects of Eugene to serve as its consulting firm for the project.

WHAT’S NEXT

Different riverfront design concepts will be presented

When/where: 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Nov. 10, EWEB headquarters, 500 E. Fourth Ave.

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