
Imagining Eugene's riverfront | A crowd of 150 that examined three development options seemed to want a more urban design

By [Susan Palmer](#), The Register-Guard, Nov 11, 2009

Fewer trees, more cafes.

That was the general message of the 150 people who showed up for a first look at development design options proposed for 27 acres along the Willamette River in downtown Eugene.

Tree-lovers, settle down. It wasn't that those who showed up for the meeting don't love the miles of trails through parks and wetlands along the Willamette. Many people explained at length how frequently they walk, bike, jog or just hang out along the river.

But perhaps retired architect Carolyn Kranzler best expressed the group zeitgeist when she said: "I think we're missing the option to sit by the river and have a cup of coffee or a beer or rent roller skates or whatever."

In other words, something a little more urban.

While there were participants who spoke in favor of improving the riparian areas, they were in the minority on Tuesday night.

The land, currently owned by the Eugene Water & Electric Board, will eventually be sold and developed when the utility moves its operations and maintenance facilities to the west side of town.

Because the development figures into the city's plans, EWEB has put together a volunteer team, hired consultants and invited the public to help shape its development vision.

The Tuesday night session was the first time people had a chance to see some options sketched out by local consultants Rowell Brokaw Architects.

The session drew John Bigelow, a retired teacher and real estate agent. "We're a city in transition and we need to think about what's going to be here 50 years from now. It's an outstanding city with a river at the center of it and I'd like to see the city reach its potential," he said.

The crowd that filled an EWEB community room to capacity got a first-hand look at three broad options, then divided up into small groups that, fueled with a little free pizza, took some time to give feedback about the proposals.

At one table, Bruce Mulligan, a human resources consultant, was drawn to the most overtly urban of the options, called River Bow, which includes terraced walkways along the river stepping up to a road, and buildings with retail shops and cafes.

"It's the most people-oriented," he said. "It's something that opens up, finally, the downtown to the riverfront."

He also liked a design element, highlighted in the first option, Organic Plaza, that visually connects with Fifth Avenue, already a lively part of the downtown area.

Ty Lockard, an insurance agent, agreed. "When we go to Portland, it's vibrant and the river's right there." he said.

John Hibbs an education consultant, offered his own grander vision: a great campus devoted to showing the world the best practices for living and working sustainably.

Following the small discussion groups, people met again with the consultants and voted electronically on a series of questions about various design elements.

While opinions varied, on one point the vote was clear. Asked where they'd most like to meet a friend, 84 percent of the group chose a sidewalk cafe with a view of the river.

Riverfront design: Consultants will distill the proposals down to one plan

Next meeting: Feb. 24, More details: Visit eugeneriverfront.com