

Questions for Michael Harwood Regarding the University's North Campus Conditional Use Permit Application

University of Oregon Senate meeting
Feb 14, 2018.

Question 1: Opportunities and process for riverfront restoration and education?

Restoring the UO Riverfront and better integrating this natural resource into the UO curriculum has been a priority of many faculty over the years. You [Michael Harwood] were part of the successful effort to restore Rocky Branch Creek at North Carolina State University. The project brought in millions of dollars in state and federal funds to restore the watershed. The creek is now a source of campus pride and is used by many departments for education.

Based on your experience, what steps could the University of Oregon take as a land steward to meaningfully restore and enhance the ecological health of its Willamette River riparian area and adjacent land?

What specific steps could the University take to integrate this natural asset (and the restoration process) with the University's educational curriculum to make it a vigorous and unique part of the campus experience?

Question 2: Impacts on recruitment?

Many faculty, staff and students have stated that the undeveloped land along the Willamette River played a significant role in choosing to work or go to school at the UO. Furthermore, the UO is working towards cultivating a reputation as a leader in "green" design and sustainability.

With the University's focus on attracting world-class people, what do we know about the value of the UO Riverfront to prospective faculty, staff, and incoming students, and possible impacts (positive or negative) to their recruitment under various possible development or restoration scenarios?

Question 3: Two separate Conditional Use Permits - north and south of the tracks?

The area under consideration in the North Campus Conditional Use Permit encompasses two discrete areas with differing sets of present conditions and future possibilities. The land south of the railroad tracks is urban and developed, while the land north of the tracks includes a natural area abutting a world-class river. Historically, faculty and student have been generally supportive of campus development south of the tracks, but have consistently voiced their concerns about development north of the tracks because of its outstanding natural qualities.

Understandably, the UO would like to have a Conditional Use Permit as soon as possible to allow needed improvements south of the tracks. The need for development north of the tracks, however, is not urgent.

Would it be possible to apply for two separate Conditional Use Permits: one for land south of the railroad tracks to expedite needed development or improvements, and one for land north of the railroad tracks to allow for a stakeholder-driven planning process and further analysis? If not, why not?

Question 4: A robust public planning process for the UO riverfront?

After the relocation of the Eugene Water and Electric Board's (EWEB) riverfront headquarters in 2010, the public utility engaged the community in a robust planning process to establish a vision for future uses and possible development of their property—

just downstream from the UO's riverfront. Numerous public meetings were held with hundreds of people participating in design charrettes guided by professional facilitators. This process resulted in a plan that has wide support from the community. As a result, and in contrast to the previous attempts by the UO to develop land north of the railroad tracks, the EWEB redevelopment plan hasn't encountered legal challenges or negative press.

How can the University engage in a similar robust and meaningful visioning process for its riverfront property—and arrive at a plan that the campus and surrounding community embraces? Would you support such an effort?

Question 5: A comprehensive analysis to identify best options?

A common planning process for public land with a numerous stakeholders involves proposing and evaluating a wide range of options. A thorough analysis of each option -- including the financial, social, and environmental costs and benefits, and the less tangible outcomes (such as institutional reputation, educational opportunities, and community support) -- are documented in a report to provide decision-makers the needed information to reach a well-informed choice.

With regards to the present North Campus Conditional Use Permit application, it is our understanding that before their vote in support of the Permit application, the Campus Planning Committee (CPC) was presented with only a narrow range of options for the land north of the railroad tracks, suggesting that the present plan arose from a less-than-comprehensive analysis. Indeed, even the the outcome of deliberations by the ecology faculty focus group were not presented to the CPC.

How can other uses and options for the riverfront property be thoroughly evaluated in the planning process prior to codifying the present plan?

Question 6: How can resident experts influence UO decision makers?

The University employs many outstanding faculty with expertise in sustainable design, urban planning, local biology and ecology. How can the University leverage their resident expertise as it relates to restoring and embracing the riverfront?

If faculty want to advocate alternate visions for the University's riverfront future, who is/are the people who have decision making authority they would discuss these with?