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But the UO says the plan to build at the riverfront will go ahead despite the objections

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Posted to Web: **Friday, Jul 30, 2010 11:29PM**

Appeared in print: **Saturday, Jul 31, 2010, page B3**

The legal battle over a proposed office development in the University of Oregon's Riverfront Research Park is continuing, with opponents filing an appeal with the Oregon Court of Appeals.

But the UO on Friday said the plan to build a new headquarters for the Eugene-based Oregon Research Institute is moving ahead regardless.

Connecting Eugene, a group whose members include a UO professor, an alumnus and a student, filed the appeal this week, after losing at the state Land Use Board of Appeals earlier this month.

The group wants to squelch the city's approval of a plan to build an 80,000-square-foot, \$17 million headquarters for ORI on vacant land at the west end of the research park, along the Willamette River.

ORI and its developer, Trammel Crow Co., had been waiting for the Land Use Board of Appeals ruling before starting construction.

ORI, Trammell Crow and the UO "remain fully committed to moving ahead with ORI's new headquarters building," Diane Wiley, director of the research park, said in an e-mail Friday. "Since the land use decisions made at every level in the process have been upheld, the development team is working to complete design and permitting of the building and does not anticipate the appeal to have any major impact on the project schedule," Wiley wrote.

Connecting Eugene said the appeal could take six months or more to resolve and the

group urged the UO to find another site in the research park for the building.

The drawn-out dispute over the ORI building is being followed closely by local business and environmental advocates. Some business advocates say Eugene needs the economic boost of a big construction project that will also provide ORI with room to grow.

Critics counter that the area next to the river should be kept undeveloped, that there is plenty of vacant office space if ORI needs more room, and that the city approval violated city rules and the master plan for the research park.

ORI currently rents office space off Franklin Boulevard, but has been seeking to build itself new digs since at least 2002.

The nonprofit institute has obtained a \$5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to help pay for the new building. The grant is stimulus money that must be spent within two years.

In its appeal papers, Connecting Eugene has not yet cited the basis for the appeal.

But the legal dispute centers around whether the city was correct to allow the UO three additional years for new construction in the research park. The UO and the city contend the additional time is allowed under city rules and plans. Critics say that is not the case, but have lost their arguments at both the city and state land-use board levels.