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New site suggested for ORI

UO President Lariviere asks developers to consider putting the new building farther from the river

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After years of controversy, University of Oregon President Richard Lariviere announced Monday that he's asked developers to consider a second site for the Oregon Research Institute and Educational Policy Improvement Center Building, hundreds of feet from the Willamette River and south of the railroad tracks.

"This is the result of many long conversations among all the parties," he said.

If the new site at 1700 Millrace Drive is approved, Lariviere said construction will begin within 30 days of the resolution. However, there are many considerations, including available space and parking, he said.

The original plan called for the \$17 million ORI and EPIC building to be constructed at 855 Riverfront Parkway, just east of the Eugene Water & Electric Board's property on the south side of the Willamette River.

However, since the plan was revealed in 2008, the 4.7-acre site, which is close to the Willamette River, has been opposed by a coalition of students, faculty, and community members.

Lariviere has instructed developer Trammell Crow Company to assess the space available at 1700 Millrace Drive and see if the smaller 2.5-acre area could accommodate the proposed four-story, 80,000-square-foot building.

"Whether or not the site is large enough for the building is still to be determined," UO spokesman Phil Weiler said. "That is one of the questions we need to work out."

To avoid losing time on the project in the event that the space is not large enough, Lariviere said, he's requested that developers continue planning for the existing site at 855 Riverfront Parkway, while simultaneously examining the feasibility of moving the project to 1700 Millrace Drive.

Connecting Eugene, the coalition that opposed the proposed plan to build the ORI and EPIC building along the river, suggested the Millrace Drive location months ago.

But another research building was proposed for the site. Lariviere said that, in the time since, the construction of that building has been postponed for unrelated reasons.

Allen Hancock, a spokesman for Connecting Eugene, said his organization is “cautiously optimistic” that this announcement might be the first step toward developing a site that UO students, faculty and community members can support.

“Connecting Eugene welcomes any move that would expedite construction of the ORI building in a location away from the riverfront,” Hancock said.

Connecting Eugene has worked to slow the construction of the ORI and EPIC building near the Willamette River, doing everything from filing objections with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers saying there are wetlands on the site to more recently filing an appeal with the state Lane Use Board of Appeals.

The original site and building had already been designed and the city of Eugene issued a Phase I building permit for the project when, in February, Connecting Eugene filed an appeal with the land board of the building permit, which approved construction of a 200-car parking lot. Connecting Eugene’s request to void that building permit on the grounds that it violates the master plan is currently under appeal by the Land Use Board of Appeals.

Lariviere said the process has been a sensitive one that has required a lot of careful attention to detail.

“I have watched the process work here in Eugene. It is probably not as expeditious process as is good for the city, but it is what it is,” he said.

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