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EDITORIAL: ORI finds a home at last

Turns out there's another site after all

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The University of Oregon made a good case for siting a new building for the Oregon Research Institute on the northwest corner of the Riverfront Research Park. One of the most compelling arguments was that the site was the only one available for that purpose. But now it turns out there's room for ORI elsewhere in the research park, which raises the question of whether years of controversy and expense could have been avoided.

At its meeting today, the state Board of Higher Education will consider approving a lease agreement with a private developer for 4.2 acres. The development company would build a \$17 million, 79,800-square-foot building for ORI and the Educational Policy Research Center.

The parcel is located between two existing research park buildings, set back from the Willamette River and south of the railroad tracks — unlike the previously proposed riverfront site on a former Eugene Water & Electric Board pole yard.

In April, UO President Richard Lariviere asked the developer, TC Eugene LLC, a subsidiary of the Trammell Crow Co., to study the new site. Lariviere's request came after three decisions by the city of Eugene favoring the riverfront site had been appealed to the state Land Use Board of Appeals. The city's decisions were upheld, but the process was time consuming — ORI has been waiting for a new building for a decade, and the developer was growing impatient.

Spearheading the appeals was a campus-community group called Connecting Eugene, which opposed urbanization of the riverfront and contended that the 20-year-old master plan for the Riverfront Research Park needed to be updated. The group's tenacity, frustrating though it may have been for those pushing the ORI project, has been rewarded. TC Eugene LLC needed only a few months to determine that the less controversial site would be adequate, and now no riverfront development is expected until after a new master plan is approved — if ever.

The switch comes at a cost. Under the agreement pending before the higher education board, TC Eugene LLC would pay the UO \$1.47 million to lease the 4.2 acres — but \$550,000 would be deducted from that amount to cover the expense of preparing

building designs for two different sites.

ORI could have been in its new building already, and the UO could have netted one-third more income from the lease, if the UO hadn't insisted there was no suitable alternative to the riverfront site.

This was not an example of how hard it is to get things done in Eugene. It's an example of how sometimes the little guys can prevail.

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