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## **[Riverfront building project nears start](http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/news/cityregion/25850433-41/building-project-riverfront-site-opponents.csp)**

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## **But opponents are still hoping to prevent it from moving forward**

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*The Register-Guard*

Posted to Web: **Thursday, Feb 3, 2011 11:51PM**

Appeared in print: **Friday, Feb 4, 2011, page A4**

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Construction of the first major new building on Eugene's Willamette riverfront in more than two decades could begin within a few weeks, although project opponents say they still hope to block it.

The developer on Thursday said initial city permits for site preparation and street infrastructure are expected within a few days, the first steps in putting up a new 80,000-square-foot, \$17 million building just east of the Eugene Water & Electric Board's property on the south side of the Willamette River. It will be the first new building in the University of Oregon's Riverfront Research Park since 1998, and it will be the first research park building right next to the river. The others are set back hundreds of feet from the river, on the south side of the railroad tracks.

A controversial project from the start, the new home for the Oregon Research Institute and Educational Policy Improvement Center is opposed by a coalition of UO students and faculty and concerned citizens who object to putting the building on a riverfront parcel they see as a key piece of green space. But backers say the project will clean up an old industrial site and put it to productive use, creating construction jobs and drawing more people to an improved riverfront location.

The university has worked through appeals and protests for the chance to build on one of the few remaining developable riverfront sites in Eugene. The 4.7-acre property is a brownfield that was once a sand and gravel operation and was fenced off for many years.

Opponents have leveled a series of arguments against the project, saying the public has had little say in the siting decision, the UO is leasing the land to the developer on a

long-term basis at a bargain rate, lease revenue doesn't justify the cost of infrastructure, and the land should be preserved as open space. But appeals to a city hearings official and the State Land Use Board of Appeals were rejected.

Project officials say the building deserves to go forward.

"We are doing no harm here; we're doing the right thing," said Bill Bach, business development manager for Trammell Crow, the company developing the site. "We're excited to get this going."

Opponents haven't given up, though Allen Hancock, a member of the group Connecting Eugene, said they have hired a land-use attorney who sent a letter to city planning officials setting out reasons why the city should not issue building permits.

But even if the permits are issued, he said the fight won't stop there.

"If the city issues a permit, we are prepared to take this to court," Hancock said. "And that could delay construction for a year or more."

The project already has been delayed more than a year by the appeals process, and Bach said he hopes work can now proceed. He said financing for the building has been worked out and that construction should take about a year.

In another move apparently aimed at slowing the project, opponents also have filed objections with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers claiming there are wetlands on the site. If so, additional permits would be needed.

Research park and university officials call that claim borderline, but have applied for wetland fill permit "out of an abundance of caution."

Bach said the purported wetlands cover less than a tenth of an acre in scattered locations and will be fenced off during construction until the wetland permit issue is resolved.

Hancock said the building probably would have been completed by now if the university and developer had been willing to sit down and listen to concerns and consider a different site.

"The lesson here is that if you're dealing with public land and you want private development, you need to work with the community if you want to expedite the process," he said.

The four-story structure would be the first new commercial building on the Willamette riverfront since EWEB built its headquarters just downstream from the site in 1988. It will include a number of green features and also will improve the riverfront bike path and bike access from Hilyard Street.

Cynthia Guinn, executive director of ORI, said the social research firm has always had high environmental values and believes building on the site will not hurt the riverfront or Eugene's green space plans. She said she is dismayed by opponents' claims about the site.

"We're trying to be a good neighbor, a good citizen, at ORI," she said. "To find ourselves on this side of an environmental fight to us is weird and uncomfortable, to say the least."

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