

Board approves Cherry Park library site

Troutdale council's request for more time denied

BY SHANNON WELLS

The Gresham Outlook, Apr 2, 2009.

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners declined to extend the Troutdale library siting process and unanimously approved the Cherry Park Marketplace site at the board's Thursday, April 2, meeting.

Led by Troutdale Mayor Jim Kight, councilors David Hartmann, Matt Wand and Doug Daoust spoke out against the Cherry Park Market site, which Commissioner Diane McKeel had recommended earlier this week. They asked for a 30-day period for developers and citizens to weigh in on three other sites that require a stand-alone building and one, the so-called "Thriftway" shopping center, that library officials twice pulled off the table during the two-year siting process.

Developers for properties on the county's final "short list" of sites also addressed the board. They agreed with council members that the Cherry Park site at Southwest 242nd Street and Cherry Park Road had significant drawbacks that their properties and plans bypassed. These included access to public transportation, distance to the Corbett area and proximity to Fairview's library, the vitality of the 13-year-old shopping center and the very idea of a library being in a "strip mall."

After echoing many of the same concerns, Board Chairman Ted Wheeler ultimately backed McKeel's recommendation with the rest of the board following suit.

"Things are different this year," Wheeler said, referring to the global recession and local budget crises, "so I intend to support Commissioner McKeel on this."

McKeel expressed concern that Troutdale's request for a 30-day extension could "set up unreasonable expectations.

"We have a fiscal responsibility," she said, praising the advantages of the site. "We have a good choice here."

Commissioner Jeff Cogen, who said he initially backed the Discovery Block site before the deal fell through last year, agreed.

"All things being equal, I would've supported" a freestanding library, he said. "But all things are not equal. There isn't such a thing as a perfect answer here."

Mayor Kight, who drummed up Troutdale City Council support at an emergency meeting Tuesday, March 31, said he was disappointed in the outcome of the board meeting. He indicated, however, that he's ready to move on to the next phase in getting the library established. "They're going to put in a library," he said. "Hopefully, residents will adapt to the fact that there's a lot of shortcomings to this particular site. A lot of people will be disappointed that it's practically in Wood Village, on the western edge of Troutdale. But at the end of the day, I think people will use the library."

He praised his fellow councilors rallying to bring concerns before the board. "The other city councilors, who I thought did a superb job, made supremely compelling arguments in getting Troutdale more involved in the location decision," he said.

Anchored by a Safeway supermarket, Cherry Park Marketplace also houses a Hollywood Video franchise, a US Bank branch and El Tapatio Restaurant. One concern that just came to the council's attention this week is that Regency Centers — owner of Cherry Park Marketplace — has put the plaza up for sale. Along with the center's mixed history of occupancy, it makes Kight less than comfortable with the site's long-term viability. "That section of the strip mall is distressed," he said. "(The owners) want to market this property. I'm sure they're popping their champagne corks. A 20-year lease with the county makes it a much more marketable product."

Mike Sublett, with Multnomah County Facilities and Property Management, countered the idea that the center being for sale creates a potential problem regarding a secure lease. He said the site's 10-year lease with three five-year options represents a longer guarantee than other developers offered.

"It does not impact us negatively," he said, noting that the popular Albina library branch in Northeast Portland is in a shopping center that's been bought and sold. "We've had branches where the property changed hands, and it was invisible to us. It's a well-written lease."

The library at Cherry Park could be operational by early 2010, Sublett said.

With siting questions now resolved, he said he and fellow county officials look forward to cooperating with Troutdale leaders to bring the library concept toward reality.

"I know the pledge of everyone is to make this a wonderful 21st century Multnomah County library branch," he said. "Everyone's really focused on that now."