

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 17-4824, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADOPTING THE WILLAMETTE FALLS RIVERWALK MASTER PLAN

Date: November 21, 2017 Prepared by: Alexandra Gilbertson, Parks & Natural Areas, Ext.1583

BACKGROUND

Willamette Falls is one of the nation's most beautiful and historic natural wonders and is the second largest waterfall by volume in North America. It has long been an important cultural and gathering place for Native American Tribes. Industrial development, beginning in the 1830s, blocked the falls from access and greatly modified the riverbank with manmade industrial structures. With the closure of the Blue Heron Paper Company in February of 2011, the opportunity arose to bring public access to the east bank of Willamette Falls for the first time in over 150 years.

The Willamette Falls riverwalk site is located on the 22-acre former Blue Heron Mill property in downtown Oregon City via an easement that was donated to Metro by the private property owner. The main portion of the site is largely defined by heavy industrial use and is currently occupied by old paper mill structures and remnants of buildings from earlier industrial eras of wool and flour processing layered upon each other and interwoven into a highly complex assembly.

After the Blue Heron mill closed in 2011 the four partner agencies - Oregon City, Clackamas County, Metro and the State of Oregon, came together as the Willamette Falls Legacy Project, to secure public access to the falls. In 2012, The Partners identified four core values in order to bring the Willamette Falls Legacy Project to life. The values have been used as a framework for all project decisions and will continue to guide future decisions as the project is implemented. In 2014, the Framework Master Plan was created to guide future development of the site.

From the winter of 2015 to present, project staff have been involved with the riverwalk planning, design and community engagement for the riverwalk. The master plan is a result of a two-year design process developed in collaboration with the City of Oregon City, Metro, Clackamas County, the State of Oregon, PGE, Falls Legacy LLC, the five confederated tribes and thousands of community members. Other stakeholders included conversations with agencies to understand the complexities and science of the site, meetings with focus groups and state partners.

Five community events and online surveys, an online Community Check-In, numerous presentations, facilitated conversations to local groups or organizations and week day tours of the site helped shape the master plan. Stakeholders and community members weighed in on their vision for the site. Eight key uses drive the design of the public space and include PGE dam operations, falls viewing and tribal access and use.

The master plan provides a long-term vision and implementation strategy to guide future public use and development of the riverwalk. This master plan document establishes project goals and objectives, key public uses, outlines site resources and conditions and summarizes the planning process. It also lays out a framework for implementation including, phasing, future maintenance and operational needs and funding.

The overall riverwalk is an aspirational plan that anticipates future funding commitments, grants and fundraising efforts. It is anticipated that the design of the riverwalk will be built in phases as funding becomes available. Goals for Phase 1 include providing a prominent view of the falls, safe and secure interim access and building demolition that will prepare the site for future phases of the riverwalk and reduce barriers for redevelopment. Phase 1 will include habitat restoration work, historic and cultural interpretive elements and provide a viewing area in the Mill H building and Boiler Plant complex.

The Partners intend to develop public access to the site in a sensitive and balanced way that ensures all four core values are considered now and into the future.

ANALYSIS/INFORMATION

1. Known Opposition

The public engagement planning and communication practices were successful in piquing interest, inspiring involvement and providing feedback loops for stakeholders. The innovative, large-scale scope of the public involvement program, as well as the success of the process, as shown by the large participation numbers, positive stakeholder feedback and broad public support of the final design prove there is positive support from the community.

However, this project has many layers and there are two topics that we have known opposition. The first being a passionate wildlife advocate concerned about the release of information via the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding trapping, hazing and culling Steller sea lions to protect threatened salmon and steelhead fish at Willamette Falls. National Marine Fisheries Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife are the regulatory authority over marine mammals. Any comments about trapping, hazing, etc. should be directed to them.

The second known opposition is from a group of community members within the City of Oregon City who believe funding \$50,000 to help form Rediscover the Falls, the non-profit friends group, is a disguise for funneling public money to improve private property and private companies. There is also a lack of trust amongst members in the community that the property owner intends to actively develop the site.

2. Legal Antecedents

Metro Council Res. 14-4556, "For the Purpose of Approving the Willamette Falls Riverwalk Memorandum of Understanding with City of Oregon City, Clackamas County and State of Oregon;" Metro Council Res. 16-4676, "For the Purpose of Approving the Willamette Falls Legacy Project Governance Intergovernmental Agreement Among the State of Oregon, Clackamas County, Metro and Oregon City;" Metro Council Res. 17-4815, "For the Purpose of Approving the Amended and Restated Intergovernmental Agreement Among the State of Oregon, Metro, Clackamas County, and Oregon City for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project."

3. Anticipated Effects

The riverwalk conceptual design was finalized in June 2017. At the same time, the project team identified a "Phase 1" for the project that involves the demolition and construction of access and a falls viewing location. On August 17, 2017, the Metro Council, acting as the Contract Review Board, approved a resolution to pursue a request for proposal to procure a Design-Build team. Once project staff reach an agreement with the property owner, next steps will involve design engineering, land use approval and permitting. The Design-Build team will prepare construction drawings and construction, including demolition and site preparation, is expected to begin following permitting approvals.

4. Budget Impacts

This effort represents the responsible expenditure of funds contemplated in the IGA, including \$5M provided by the Metro Natural Areas Bond funding, \$5M provided by SB 5506, \$1.2M from Oregon City, roughly \$10M from private fundraising, \$400,000 from the property owner and \$7.5M provided by HB5030 and SB 5507. Alternative funding sources, such as grants, may also be pursued to help provide additional funding for design and construction for the riverwalk.

The project also spurred the creation of a nonprofit friends group, Rediscover the Falls that is dedicated to advancing the Willamette Falls Legacy Project through building friendships and fundraising. Additional funding secured by fundraising or grants could potentially extend the project completion date.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Staff recommends adoption of Resolution No. 17-4824, for the purpose of approving the Willamette Falls Riverwalk Master Plan as presented.