

Portland Parks Bureau lays out concerns about proposed Lents baseball stadium

by Mark Larabee, The Oregonian
Friday June 05, 2009, 8:10 PM

A baseball stadium for Lents?

A conceptual plan shows the footprint of a proposed minor league stadium in Lents Park and two new parking lots. Walker Stadium, which is smaller, is there now.



STEVE COWDEN/THE OREGONIAN

The Portland Bureau of Parks & Recreation has significant concerns about the proposal to build a Triple A baseball stadium in Lents Park, though it appears that the political agreement needed to make the deal happen is beginning to solidify.

On Thursday, Commissioner Dan Saltzman put his framework for a favorable vote on the deal in writing. And a memo written by Parks Bureau Director Zari Santner analyzes how the stadium would affect Lents Park.

Santner's memo, which includes maps and an aerial photograph of Lents Park, offers a look at the proposed footprint of the stadium, including parking lots and playing fields.

The \$85 million public-private plan, negotiated by Mayor Sam Adams and Commissioner Randy Leonard with Portland Beavers owner Merritt Paulson, would build the baseball stadium and renovate PGE Park for Major League Soccer. Paulson also owns the Portland Timbers, which will become a Major League Soccer team in 2011.

The stadium project would take about 16 acres of 38-acre Lents Park, and the building would be constructed where Walker Stadium is today. Walker is used for league play but is otherwise locked.

In her memo, Santner said the project would convert about 2.4 acres into parking lots, and the expanded stadium footprint would take an additional three acres. "These 5.4 acres are lost and would not be replaced under the latest proposal," she wrote.

Saltzman suggests using some of the \$2 million set aside for park replacement on field upgrades in the park and at a nearby elementary school.

The Pacific Coast League requires stadiums to accommodate 1,500 cars. The Lents proposal calls for 80 parking spaces on the north side of the stadium and 200 spaces in a new lot south of the stadium. The rest would be handled offsite, possibly at TriMet's park-and-ride lots and in private lots.

Santner said the bureau is against any additional parking inside the park and suggests that parking be concentrated on the north side of the park. She also said the bureau's land analysis would allow for only 260 spaces. "We are also concerned about the lack of parking for park users who are not coming to the park for Beavers games," she wrote.

Santner also has concerns about tree removal. Early estimates by the Parks Bureau suggested that 177 trees would be removed, though a recent count suggests it would be 107.

Saltzman said he will require that any tree that is cut will be replaced. But neighbors of Lents Park who oppose the plan said the large shade trees would take decades to grow.

Still not addressed is how game traffic and on-street parking might affect the surrounding neighborhoods.

Saltzman has the crucial third vote needed to make the project happen. His opinion about the deal has been anticipated for weeks, and his silence had some at City Hall wondering whether he would try to derail it.

"I can support Lents as a Triple A site subject to the things that are laid out in the memo," Saltzman said Friday. "If the community support is ambiguous or the financials don't look good, then I think the council should negotiate a soccer-only deal."

Leonard has said he would oppose any plan that would move the Beavers out of Portland. He hopes the stadium will be a catalyst for economic change in Lents.

Leonard could not be reached for comment Friday. His chief of staff, Ty Kovatch, said he was glad Saltzman offered his thoughts on the proposal and that he was confident they could be met.

Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the Parks Bureau, opposes the plan. He has said that city parkland should never be given away to a private enterprise.

The Lents Urban Renewal Advisory Committee will soon get a chance to weigh in on the plan. That meeting, still unscheduled, is expected to get testy.

And while Saltzman has signaled his support, it's still unclear whether Leonard and Adams will get Paulson to go along with Saltzman's conditions. Paulson declined to comment.

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