

## Recreation location? Linfield, city explore partnership for future facility

The city of McMinnville and Linfield University have agreed to explore siting the city's future recreation facility on Linfield-owned land adjacent to its campus.

Linfield President Miles Davis and city manager Jeff Towery announced the potential partnership at Thursday's MacPac meeting, saying they have gotten only as far as being open to consider all opportunities.

"Being in education is a unique position and it is a trust for a town," Davis said. "Every once in a while, you get an opportunity to blue sky something."

The university released a statement Thursday saying it and the city have agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding to begin preliminary discussions.

"If the right deal came together that benefited Linfield and met the city's needs, we would consider it," said Mary Ann Rodriguez, Linfield's chief financial officer and vice president for administration. "But we're a long way from that. These talks are very, very early-stage."

The new facility would be located on the 80-acre parcel of land bounded by Highway 99, Booth Bend Road, Keck Drive and the Linfield campus. The land, currently leased for farming, was donated to the college by Hewlett-Packard after Linfield purchased the company's adjacent plant buildings and 17 acres for \$4.2 million.

While the initial agreement doesn't commit the city to a final decision on a partnership with Linfield, Towery said he'll do everything possible to make it happen. Davis concurred. Towery said Monday it was Linfield that initially approached the city about the possible collaboration.

MacPac is a 19-person city advisory committee formed last year to develop plans for renovating current facilities or building new ones, including a community center, aquatic center and library. It is tasked with identifying a location, programming and design for a single facility or facilities, and making a recommendation to the city council.

Parks and Recreation Director Susan Muir emphasized that MacPac must analyze this possible location through a long list of criteria to ensure it meets community needs, a task it will begin in January. Having a potential location identified will also help guide the rest of the group's work, Muir said.

"This is a really exciting prospect, and I look forward to going through the conversations, and MacPac will do the analysis before we take it to the public," she said.



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Land located on Linfield's campus bordered by Keck Drive, Booth Bend Road and Highway 99W is being discussed as a possible site of a future city recreation facility. The property is surrounded by a walking track with a number of student art installations on one end; the field is leased for farming. Albertsons can be seen in the distance.

It is vague how MacPac's work will change with Linfield in the equation and how facility operations and finances would be shared. Councilor Zack Geary, a member of MacPac, emphasized the group still has an important role in seeking to understand what the community prefers for its new recreation facility.

Davis and Towery highlighted the opportunity for more than just a combined community and aquatic center on the property, including the potential for a performing arts venue and other community spaces.

However, Geary made a point to tell MacPac members the mission remains to first meet the critical needs of the city.

MacPac member Lisa Macy-Baker, a former tennis coach at Linfield and McMinnville High School, thinks a public-private partnership would be advantageous for both the city and university.

"It's always positive to have a symbiotic relationship with Linfield," she said. "I do think it's a solid location in terms of its size and the potential to think real big, to think beyond even what we've maybe been thinking."

She added, "There's so much unknown right now that you have to proceed with optimism and then go from there."

Kevin Chambers, a managing partner at Headwater Investments, said Linfield's enthusiasm to explore a collaboration surprised him, although MacPac had discussed it.

MacPac must be mindful as it now dreams bigger, Chambers said. Not everyone may feel comfortable venturing onto a university campus, he said.

"I think it's a really cool program...as Dr. Davis said, one of the goals is to integrate people more into the Linfield community," Chambers said. "We need to be aware that this is a city and Linfield partnership, it's not just a Linfield building getting built."

Davis and Towery said the city is trying to include a diversity, equity and inclusion framework as it pursues this partnership. They appreciate the location because it's on Highway 99, has a bus stop nearby, and can easily be wheelchair-accessible, among other reasons.

Mayor Scott Hill said he considers the Linfield site a prime location, and it could build support for a possible bond that may be required to fund the project.

"When we talk about a legacy project, it's in a legacy location," Hill said. "When you're looking at a bond and the efforts that go on from that perspective...it takes a heavy lifting and it needs passion from people who go out and tell the story."

Sara Tucholsky, a substitute teacher and MacPac member, highlighted the opportunity for the city to help develop an important piece of property. Davis noted at Thursday's meeting how Linfield easily could sell the land to a big-box store, but this option would allow a much different path.

Tucholsky said other locations being considered would cut into green space in parks; this one doesn't. Some people expressed concern about losing the walking trail on the property, but she envisions MacPac would try to replace it with an enhanced trail.

The need for ongoing community engagement with the committee was stressed by MacPac members.

"This end of town has a lot of potential. This is a way for the community to have a hand in what this side of town looks like," Tucholsky said. "My only concern right now is just that the community understands that MacPac serves a role for them."