



600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232-2736
oregonmetro.gov

September 6, 2016

Fellow Willamette Falls Legacy Project Partners:

We are writing to clarify Metro's position on the proposal to build a developed whitewater park at Willamette Falls. We strongly encourage the Partners Group to move forward with the public riverwalk that is taking shape, without considering the integration of a whitewater park.

We are poised to bring Oregonians up-close to Willamette Falls for the first time in more than 150 years — a remarkable achievement for Oregon City and all of Oregon. Exploring a developed whitewater park right now threatens our ability to deliver the riverwalk on time and on budget, jeopardizing the commitment we have made to our community. We cannot afford to do that.

The proposal for a large-scale whitewater park in the Willamette River is fun and interesting. But, at this point, it raises more questions than it answers. The Metro Council's concerns fall in three major areas: budget, feasibility and compatibility.

Budget

Integrating a developed whitewater park into our project could come at a significant cost to the public. Advocates of a whitewater park predict it would cost \$1 million to design and another \$9 million to build — likely an underestimate, according to our design team. This burden cannot be carried by the riverwalk project. The vast majority of design funding comes from Metro's voter-approved 2006 Natural Areas Bond Measure, which must be used to protect habitat along the river and provide public access to the Falls. Additionally, the State of Oregon has committed \$12.5 million for construction of the project that is restricted to the riverwalk. Slowing down to accommodate a whitewater park could put us at risk of missing our deadline to spend that money.

Feasibility

The prospect of a developed whitewater park raises a long list of logistical questions that could substantially delay — or even unhinge — the riverwalk. For starters, the easement that allows us to use the former Blue Heron site was acquired to preserve habitat and create a riverwalk, not provide high-intensity recreation. To build a whitewater park, advocates would need to negotiate a new easement with the property owner and Metro. They would also need to secure water rights and ensure the safety of kayakers near the dam operated by Portland General Electric. And, just as significantly, they would need to come up with a plan for operating and maintaining a whitewater park; our research shows that few, if any, operate without public subsidy anywhere in the country.



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Compatibility

From the beginning, Oregonians have joined us in supporting four core values to guide the future of Willamette Falls: Public Access, Healthy Habitat, Economic Redevelopment, and Historic and Cultural Interpretation. We have already heard concerns about the impact of a developed whitewater park from important partners, including tribal representatives and environmental leaders. Several community champions have also raised concerns that the proposed whitewater park may have a negative impact on riverwalk fundraising efforts. While a whitewater park could support some of the project's values, it could likely come at the expense of others.

As public servants, we owe it to Oregonians to stay focused on delivering what we promised: an opportunity to connect with one of our state's most spectacular natural treasures. That means having the discipline to say no to ideas that could set us off course, no matter how heartfelt or intriguing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "T" and "H".

Tom Hughes
Council President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carlotta Collette". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "C" and "C".

Carlotta Collette
Councilor, District 2

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M" and "B".

Martha Bennett
Chief Operating Officer