

# *Willamette Falls*

◦ LEGACY PROJECT ◦

## **Visioning Phase** **Community Engagement Summary**



**Revised Draft – October 7, 2013**

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## Introduction

The Willamette Falls Legacy Project is a unique opportunity to establish a vision and framework master plan for the former Blue Heron Paper Company industrial site in downtown Oregon City. This summary report highlights Community Engagement and Communications activities conducted from July through early September 2013 during the first phase of community engagement.

## Purpose

The purpose of this particular phase is to create a vision and generate ideas to use for the site development of design alternatives. The goal of the community engagement effort for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project is to build long-term and informed community champions through transparent communication and engagement. Additionally, community engagement and participation ensures that this regionally and state-wide significant project has a vision developed by the community. The redevelopment opportunity has potential for tourism and economic redevelopment, public access to the falls, restoring and maintaining healthy habitat, and in-depth and meaningful cultural and historical interpretation. These broadly reaching and interconnected opportunities need to reflect the voices of Oregonians who will visit, invest, work in, and otherwise enjoy this place.

## Methods

From July to September, project leaders and staff connected with thousands online and held conversations with hundreds of people. We held rich discussions with 28 local and regional groups, ranging from civic, business, environmental and government organizations. We talked one-on-one with people of all ages while tabling at seven summer events including farmers markets, West Linn's Centennial Celebration and Concerts in the Park. We had an outstanding turnout at the first interactive community event held at the First City Festival on July 27 in Oregon City. Participants there gave us nearly 1,000 distinct comments and ideas for the site. We reached more than 2,100 people through Metro's regional Opt In Online Opinion Panel and the online survey on the project website. Weekly we continue to reach hundreds through an email newsletter, an online blog, and Facebook.



*Willamette Falls Legacy Project staff answering questions.*

## Results

The response has been enthusiastic and positive. People are excited about the opportunity to redevelop the Blue Heron site. They have many creative ideas and while not everyone has the same vision, themes have emerged in accordance with the four interrelated core

values for site redevelopment. The four core values are public access, economic redevelopment, healthy habitat, and historical and cultural interpretation. What is important to note is feedback from the community often highlighted more than one core value in any given response. Each value's success is interrelated with another and people are interested in supporting the interrelated values. What follows is a summary of key themes and representative quotes that illustrate community visions. Themes are organized according to the four interrelated core values though you will note some overlap with other values. Additional detail can be found in the Opt In Report and associated appendices to this report.



Community members watching a video about Willamette Falls.

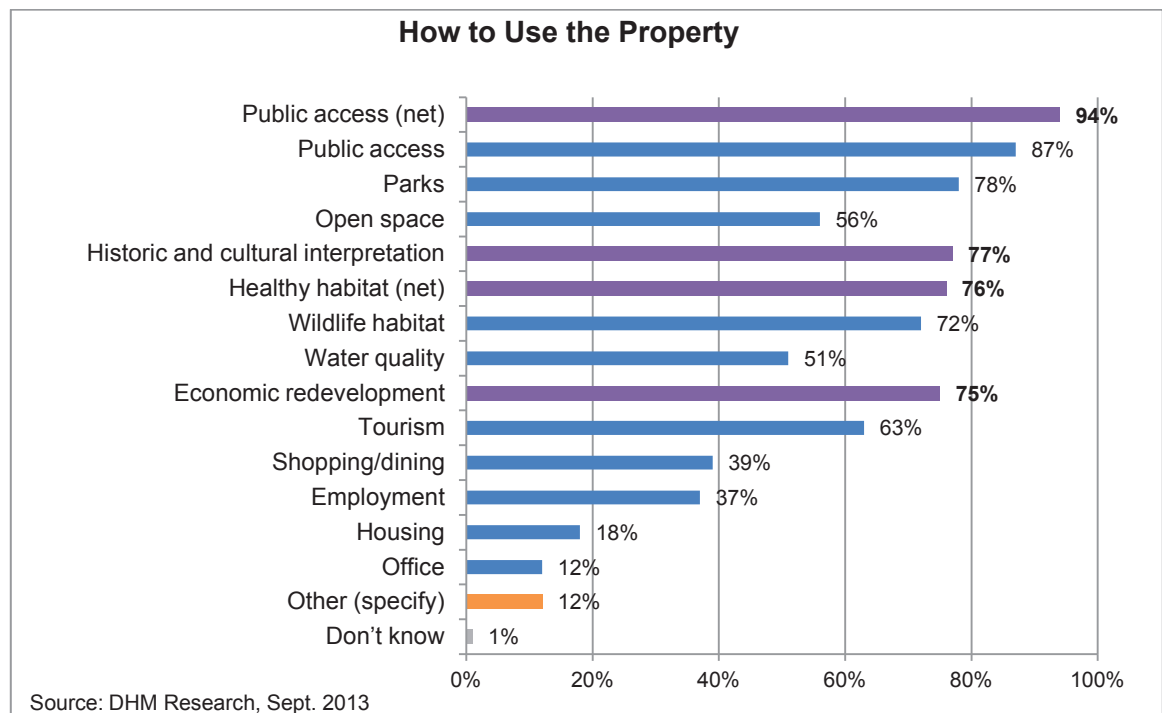


Figure 1: Top priorities for how to redevelop the site. Purple bars illustrate the net response for each of the four core values.

## Public Access

Access to the site for the public is a solid priority for most people. Of the 2,134 people that responded to the Vision Survey, 94% support some form of public access on the site. Many envision open space in the floodplain areas, a promenade along the river edge, and places to gather for music, farmers markets, and event space within view of the falls. Respondents would like to see natural places to gather and observe/enjoy nature as it was prior to modern development. Some stakeholder groups preferred art-focused public spaces while others desired natural environmental features. While nearly all respondents implied that some



development is expected to occur on the site, public space and access is a top priority in nearly all conversations with stakeholders and regional residents.

Sentiments include:

*"I'd like to see an outdoor concert venue."*

*"I'd like to see a park that shares Native American history."*

*"I want public access to be near the falls, such as with a trail, overlook, or something similar."*

*"Concerts and festivals, recreation, viewing platform, pathways/hiking, interpretive center, summer camp programs."*

*"I'd like to see a white water park."*

Connectivity also was raised consistently in community conversations related to public access. Bicycle and pedestrian access to the site was often highlighted, as well as the fact that transportation infrastructure needs to be addressed in order to allow the public access to the site as well as to create an opportunity for redevelopment.

Sentiments related to connectivity include:

*"Develop a pedestrian bridge across Highway 99 to access the site."*

*"Put a parking garage on site close to Main Street and the highway."*

*"Create a pedestrian and bicycle friendly environment, possibly car-free."*

*"Get a water taxi service going to bring people to the site from the river."*

*"Create dock access to the site with consideration of where the dock is placed to best mitigate strong currents, also ensure a connection to the docks for people to access them from a parking area or other amenities on the site."*

*"Create a loop from downtown, to the site, and to the promenade."*

*"Recreate the historic grid structure of the site for access points."*

Overall, participants recognize the significance of this legacy site and highlight playing off the natural amenities to create beautiful public spaces for people to enjoy.

## Economic Redevelopment

Of the 2,134 respondents to the Vision Survey, 75% support some sort of economic redevelopment activity for the site. More than half – 63% believe tourism is important, 39% are in favor of shopping/dining, 37%



*Ideas people shared for the future of Willamette Falls at the first community event in July.*

in favor of employment opportunities, 18% for housing and 12% for office space on site. Participants are most interested in mixed-use, restaurant, and local business development in areas farther from the river edge. They do not favor development which could block view sheds or create impacts in the floodplain / natural habitat restoration areas. Many people stated specifically that they are not interested in big box type developments or malls and specifically cited on a few occasions that lifestyle centers such as Bridgeport Village are a local example of development that they would not want to see on this site.

Sentiments include:

*"Mixed-uses and a museum, natural trail, residential area, and restaurants with outdoor seating."*

*"Develop a park and greenway, preserve the industrial feel, include retail and food, a local vibe, housing, and street car."*

*"Breweries!"*

*"Adaptively re-use structures."*

*"Bring creative class and traded sector jobs here, i.e., clean tech, light manufacturing, medical technology, film and video, design."*

*"Live/work opportunities."*

*"No big box developments."*

In community conversations with environmental-focused stakeholder groups, recommendations regarding economic development included a green and sustainable approach. Additionally, there was some emphasis on economic development for lower income, minority or traditionally disadvantaged communities.

Sentiments include:

*"Can this area be an eco-district? Share resources and uses, the site could generate it's own electricity."*

*"Think of ourselves here as river people, create development not with just 150 years in mind, but 1,000 years, how will developments be sustainable over a great length of time?"*

*"Leverage the natural amenities of the site with redevelopment opportunities."*

*"Incorporate anti-poverty strategies with community focused economic development."*

*"Ensure people from all walks of life and culture are welcome here for work and play."*



A community member sharing his ideas for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project.

In conversations with business-minded stakeholder groups and individuals, flexibility for the developer of the site was often mentioned as well as a need to focus on higher wage jobs.

*“Don’t over-regulate the site, let the market do its thing.”*

*“Focus on family wage jobs, many jobs were lost with the closure of the Blue Heron plant for Oregon City.”*



Folks learning about the Willamette Falls Legacy Project.

## Healthy Habitat

There is strong interest among respondents in creating and restoring healthy habitats on site for native plants and animal species. Of the 2,134 survey responses, 76% identify healthy habitat as something for which they would like the site to be used. There is a strong interest in water quality and stream flows, particularly as they relate to healthy fish populations and other important ecological features.

Sentiments include:

*“Return the area to a park giving the public access to the falls.”*

*“Public access; respect for indigenous historical practices; parks; environmental rehabilitation.”*

*“Restore habitat as much as possible, utilize basalt outcroppings and native plants.”*

*“Identify ways to keep water going over the falls in the summer to maintain mist habitats for plants.”*

*“I’d like have opportunity to see and fish for fall Chinook & lamprey.”*

## Historic and Cultural Interpretation

A majority of survey respondents – 77% – are interested in historical and cultural interpretation amenities on site. People are interested in learning about and honoring the Falls’ pre-European history, as well as its post-colonial industrial history. Many people combine this with public space and healthy habitat so that there is integrity in historical ways the site looked before European settlers arrived. What is interesting is that buildings and structures were only mentioned as a priority in 11% of the responses and when they were mentioned the key point was utilizing adaptive re-use for the sustainability of the historic architecture in redevelopment. Preservation was only mentioned 25 times out of 1,776 unique responses. However, in community conversations with Oregon City community members, preservation of buildings was cited frequently.

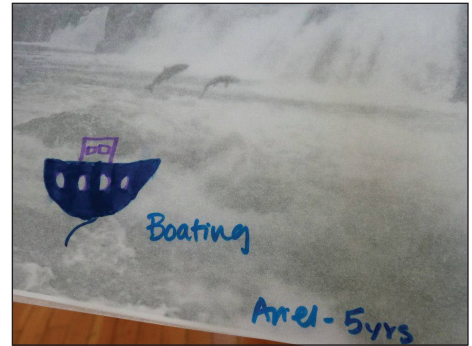
Sentiments include:

*“An interpretive center/museum that does not just focus on the end of the Oregon Trail but the Native Americans who lived there before that.”*

*“Include the native history of the site in the art, in the design. Include informational signs with old pictures. Include a traditional building for Natives to use for meetings and ceremonies in the park.”*

*“Honor the indigenous history and natural history; work to restore migratory fish habitat.”*

*“Focus on the Native American cultures that lived there as well as the settlers that followed. A to Z history with no emphasis on any particular group or time period. A historical center with additional meeting rooms for a facility that would attract tourists, schools and businesses.”*



*A young community member shares what she would like to see in the future along the Falls.*

## Detailed Summary of Activities

### Sovereign Nations

Project leadership has initiated a robust dialogue with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is the Willamette Valley Treaty Tribe which ceded much of the land in the Willamette Valley to settlers, including Willamette Falls and the Blue Heron paper mill site. Team members continue to outreach to the other Tribes with an interest in the area, including the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

### Community Conversations with Stakeholder Groups

Between July and September, staff and project partners conducted 28 community conversations which reached representatives of more than 42 stakeholder groups engaging more than 300 people in dialogue about the future of the site. A list of groups is included in the appendix.

### First City Festival

On July 27, 2013 partners held a community interactive event at the First City Festival with five points of interaction: two booths at 7th and Main street, one informational and one for activities. A downtown storefront was dedicated to the project – inside a PGE produced video played in a looped sequence about the site. Participants had an opportunity draw ideas for the site. There were three activities at the site entrance, one to take photos and look around with binoculars. There was also a parking lot sized map on which to leave comments, and at



an overlook nearby, materials to make a plaque rubbing of the falls. We received more than 980 comments from hundreds of people throughout the day. A “ribbon cutting” ceremony with elected officials Metro Councilor Carlotta Collette, Clackamas County Chair John Ludlow, and Oregon City Mayor Doug Neeley. Oregon City Manager Dave Frasher formally kicked off the project. A detailed report of the outcomes of the First City Festival is available in the appendix.

## Metro Opt In Online Opinion Panel

Utilizing the comment form for the community conversations we developed an identical survey form for Metro’s Opt In and the project’s website. DHM Research collected the additional data received from the project website and hand written comment forms and incorporated it in the data analysis of the more than 1,800 comments received through Opt In, totaling 2,134 survey responses received in full. These comments and responses make up the bulk of the visioning summary as they incorporate all the community conversations, online interactions, and Opt In participation regarding the vision for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project. A full copy of the DHM report is available in the appendix.

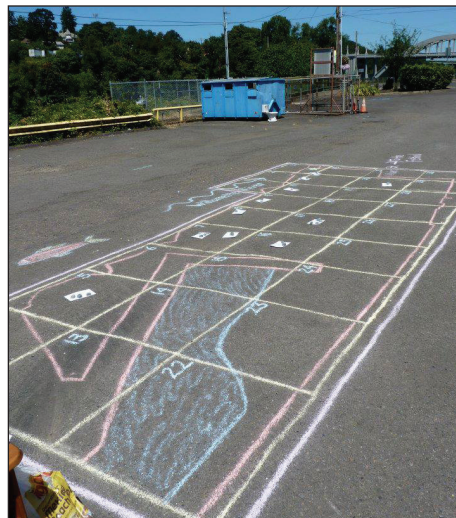
## Tabling Events

Project team staff tabled at seven events through from July 10 – September 13 and interfaced with hundreds of people.

- Downtown Farmers Market
- Oregon City Saturday Market
- Oregon-California Trail Alliance conference
- End of the Oregon Trail concert
- West Linn Centennial Celebration
- Oregon City Concert in the Park
- We Love Clean Rivers Clackamas River Clean Up

## Next Steps

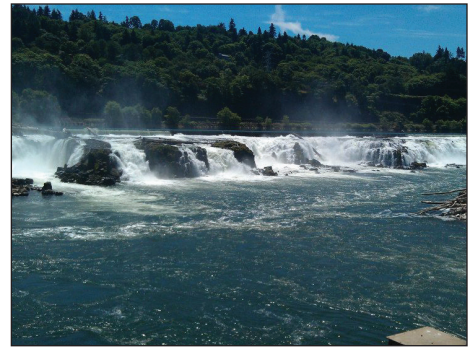
With the conclusion of the Vision Phase, team members are developing scenarios based on this guidance and the opportunities and constraints work. The next community interactive event is scheduled for October 10, 2013.



*Community members leave comments on a giant chalk map of the site to share what they would like to see in the future.*

## Appendices

1. Survey Results
2. First Community Interactive Event Summary
3. Community Conversations Held to Date
4. Community Engagement and Communications Plan
5. Meeting Notes from Community Conversations
6. List of Tours and Table Events
7. Comments Sent in Via the Website
8. Visioning Feedback from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde



*View of the Falls from West Linn.*