



Brooklyn Action Corps Neighborhood Association

Restoration of Brooklyn's river access, a historical perspective

Due to its close proximity to the Willamette, Brooklyn had, at one time, nearly unlimited access to the river. There are historical accounts, as well as recollections of elderly current residents of Brooklyn, describing their past enjoyment of fishing and swimming in the river. This access was diminished by the construction of McLoughlin Blvd in 1937. After that, only brave and agile souls (sorry no seniors) could still dash across the new four-lane "99E Super-Highway" to get to the river. Subsequent widening of McLoughlin to six lanes in 1971 eliminated even that access.

In 1967, having just purchased Riverside Park on the river below SE Haig Street, the city began planning to provide access to that park, to the river and to the "Greenway Trail", which was then still only a future concept. However, progress in making that implicit promise to restore Brooklyn's access a reality was slow.

The city, and therefore Brooklyn, had an access easement to the river derived from the SE Center Street right-of-way extension to the river. In 1979, at the request of Ross Island Sand and Gravel, City Council vacated that right-of-way, relying on a potential alternative access three blocks north at SE Haig Street. This was at the recommendation of the Planning Commission, who cited the setting aside of sufficient funds from the cancelled Mt. Hood Freeway project for the alternative access development. Based primarily on that recommendation, but perhaps influenced by a simultaneous offer from Ross Island Sand and Gravel of a gift to the city of adjacent property, City Council unanimously voted in favor of the abandonment of the Center street right-of-way.

During discussions prior to that vote, it is clear that Council was concerned with retaining access to the river for the neighborhoods. Commissioner Connie McCready stated "I am very concerned about access" and spent considerable time and staff on the issue. In addition, there was unanimous opposition to the vacation expressed by the Brooklyn Action Corp, the Inner SE Neighborhoods Coalition, and SE Uplift. The neighborhood testimony recommended waiting until the alternative access was assured so as to not risk losing all access. However, City Council voted in favor of vacation, based on the "trade" for the potential SE Haig street site.

Progress on this new site was delayed and postponed, in spite of inclusion in sequential city budgets. One postponement was requested by Council to determine potential usage of the site and the park. The survey found strong support expressed by Brooklyn and surrounding neighborhood residents with a projection of 5-7000 users per month. After another delay, and in spite of strong support by

Commissioners Mike Lindberg and Charles Jordan, City Council, lead by Mayor Frank Ivancie, voted to cancel the project in 1981.

With this cancellation, the inner-city SE neighborhoods lost their hope for access to the river and their new park. In essence, after promising to restore Brooklyn's historic access, which had been sacrificed primarily for development to benefit suburban commuters, City Council traded existing access at SE Center Street for an alternative access project, which it then cancelled.

Present day Brooklyn is a thriving, revitalized neighborhood. Characterized by a large proportion of industrialized areas and with a relatively high housing density, the neighborhood has only two small city parks. Access to the beautiful natural area of Riverside Park, in combination with access to the new Springwater Trail, is important to continue that revitalization. It will enhance the livability of Brooklyn and provide family recreation to our inner-city neighborhood. Restoration of our historic access to the river will honor commitments, both implicit and explicit, that have been made to our neighborhood in the past and it will demonstrate active commitment by City Council to the intent of the River Renaissance Program.

Don Stephens
Board member,
Brooklyn Action Corps