



Wednesday, April 21, 2010

Depot plans taking shape

Commercial development, wildlife habitat still top list of alternatives

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Compromise. That was the key word Thursday at an open house to discuss the re-use of the Umatilla Chemical Depot property once the facility closes.

Thursday's public forum allowed the Local Reuse Authority and Dana Mission Support Team to present five alternative uses for the 20,000 acre site, which could be vacated as early as spring 2012.

The LRA is working to meet several goals for the site: promoting economic development, protecting environmental habitat, supporting the security of national defenses, job development and promoting quality of life for local communities. The LRA's preferred alternative includes industrial and commercial development for the ports of both Umatilla and Morrow counties, a 640-acre plot for agriculture and large areas for habitat preservation and Oregon Army National Guard training grounds.

Thursday's open house allowed officials involved with the project and various alternatives to answer questions about their needs and wants for the property.

Irrigon City Manager Gerald Breazeale, for example, spoke about that city's plan for the site, which would include overseeing water and wastewater treatment and developing the southwest corner of the site for business.

"This entire facility has a great deal of infrastructure. It has roads, it has water, it has power," Breazeale said. "The city's interest is that we believe this area could be developed for industrial use, and we believe it could be done in the short-term."

Attendees could also ask questions and provide feedback about the various aspects to the reuse plan. One resident asked about installing an airport; another questioned the location of owl burrows necessary for habitat preservation. Others questioned fire coverage, and Lt. Col. Christian Rees said the National Guard will help with both habitat preservation and fire control if a training facility is established.

"We are required to have a resources plan on all our training areas, and that does include managing species (such as the burrowing owl)," he said.

Rees said the National Guard would use the property for five primary reasons: maneuvering training, shooting range training, vehicle storage and maintenance, munitions storage and infrastructure administration. The National Guard would also provide fire and emergency services.

The public comment period on the reuse report will end the last day of this month, and the full report is available at www.missionumatilla.com.

To submit your comments or feedback, complete the Public Comment Electronic Form on the website and e-mail it to ks@missionumatilla.com or mail to the address listed on the form.