

## **Don't Mess With Riverfront Park**

Salemians love their Riverfront Park. They don't want part of this "treasure" (oft-heard word at the last City Council meeting) handed over to a private developer for an access road to Pringle Square.

Watching the meeting via CCTV, I was moved by how passionate people were about preserving the Carousel. Shrinking its parking lot and putting a road next to the area where excited children jump out of cars struck many as a really bad idea.

City staff said the proposed parking lot reconfiguration raises safety concerns. For sure. After hearing many earfuls from concerned citizens, the Council postponed a decision on the public-to-private land takeover until September 9.

So there's time to consider alternative ways to provide access to the Pringle Square apartments. The developer, Minto View LLC, a Mountain West Investment affiliate, is attempting a hard-nosed "our way or the highway" strategy.

But it isn't true that the only way to cross the railroad tracks is via the current State Street crossing into the Carousel parking lot. Nothing is stopping the City from applying for a new railroad crossing on the Pringle Square property near Trade and Ferry streets.

I confirmed this from two reliable sources: Claudia Howells, who used to manage ODOT's Rail Division, and Richard Shankle, the Division's current Crossing Safety Section manager.

The cost of a new at-grade (meaning, not an overpass or underpass) crossing would be about \$500,000. It would be a public crossing, but the involved public and private parties could work out a deal about who pays for it.

How much is preserving public safety and the treasure of Riverfront Park worth? The Residences at Riverfront Park is a \$17 million apartment complex. Forking out 3% of that for a railroad crossing that provides access across private Pringle Square property, rather than a public park, seems reasonable.

There's no requirement to close one railroad crossing if another is granted. The current popular State Street crossing could remain. To repeat: nothing whatever prevents the City from applying for a new public crossing on the Pringle Square property. The road (or track) is open.

I asked Shankle if any City of Salem officials or Pringle Square developers had contacted him about the possibility of a new at-grade crossing. No, he told me. That's disturbing.

Why isn't every possible alternative to taking over part of Riverfront Park for a private access road being considered? Why is the focus solely on using the current State Street railroad crossing, rather than building a new crossing on Pringle Square land?

Probably the new crossing would require modifying the plan to put a Marquis nursing home on the development. If so, great. A nursing home doesn't belong on Salem's downtown waterfront. Adjusting its site plan is fine. Doing away with the nursing home, even better.

City Council, don't mess with Riverfront Park. Listen to what citizens are saying. Tell the developer to apply for a railroad crossing on its own property.

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