

Reflections on the City Council hearing regarding Riverview Natural Area (RVNA)

By

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Yesterday, City Council held a hearing on a single agenda item: *Accept the 2015 Management Plan for River View Natural Area as a guide for future protection and use of the natural area* (Resolution introduced by Commissioner Fritz). Parks & Recreation Director Mike Abbaté and RVNA plan manager Emily Roth provided staff input for the council. Additional testimony came from nearly thirty others, evenly split between ardent supporters of mountain biking and those who clearly emphasized the conservation aspects of the proposal.

There was considerable discussion and demonstrated misunderstanding about the conservation easement granted to Metro by the City of Portland as a term of purchase: *"a conservation easement to preserve the natural features of the Property that provide significant wildlife habitat values and contribute to water quality."*

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/471540>

The language of the easement is clear and specific: the general purposes of this easement are to ensure that RVNA will be *"retained forever predominantly in its natural condition"* for the protection or preservation of (i) natural areas, (ii) land areas for recreation or education, (iii) open space, and (iv) air or water quality.

The easement has a specific purpose: *"the more specific purpose of this Easement is to prevent any use of, or activity on, the Easement Area that will impair or interfere with the Conservation Values, as such term is defined herein."* The easement also states *"...permitted uses shall therefore include public access for nature based recreation, such as **hiking and nature watching, environmental education and research**"*.

It seems to me that any activity that is not explicitly mentioned in this list **must be demonstrated to not impair or interfere** with the conservation values in the easement. This does not exclude mountain-biking and dog-walking per se, but those who advocate these uses will have to prove their lack of impact, a difficult task.

Gradients within RVNA frequently exceed 20% and run as high as 40%. Unauthorized biking trails running straight down the fall line had been constructed on such slopes. These seem inconsistent with trail-building principles espoused by the International Mountain-Biking Association.

<https://www.imba.com/resources/trail-building/designing-and-building-sustainable-trails>

CVNA's official position stated that it "*strongly supports sustainable uses of RVNA that are consistent with the conservation values*", and "*that the proposed management plan for RVNA is sensible, consistent with those same values **provided that permitted activities are also consistent with the conservation easement**, and will well serve the needs of the community.*"

There was more praise than criticism for the work of Parks & Recreation - deservedly so, in my opinion. Commissioner Nick Fish had extensive comments at the final vote. I was most impressed by his emphasis that a great deal of planning in the City of Portland is driven by community values, and those values are shared almost all of us. It was an uplifting end to what could have been an extremely contentious afternoon.