

Interview w/Mayor Sandi Bloem re: McEuen Field – 3.4.10

Mayor Sandi Bloem, fresh from her talk to the Kootenai Environmental Alliance at noon, answered several questions posted by Huckleberries Online re: McEuen Field:

Q: So what's going on with McEuen Field?

Mayor Sandi Bloem: The council is going to bring McEuen Field forward now because it's time to reconstruct Front Street. Front Street was one of the three streets that was part of the original downtown redevelopment plan. But it has never been addressed. It's important to know how Front will be connected to McEuen. We also need to re-evaluate downtown parking as move forward. LCDC has always had McEuen Field as one of its priorities. We need to know how a parking structure near the federal building will affect parking adjacent to McEuen. We also have been made aware of a substantial grant that is available to those cities that have participated in Mayor's Institute (which Coeur d'Alene has) for planning purposes. It's a long shot. But we want to apply. *(Continued below)*

Q: What kind of a time line to you foresee in terms of reworking McEuen?

Bloem: Council has charged staff with deciding what process we use to put McEuen back on the table. We need to communicate with the public. Let them know why we're dealing with this now. We need to look at what has changed down there in the past 10 years. Also, we need to see what uses we need down there now. This is an opportunity for public as a whole to create the kind of place and uses they want.

Q: What will become of previous plans for McEuen Field?

Bloem: There's several plans from the past that can all be pulled forward and looked at again conceptually. There's no plan in mind for what's going to happen at McEuen at this time. There's things we've heard every time: Bring people to the water, not cars. Create a gathering place. Create as much green as possible. Put parking underground. The community pretty much agrees on those things. In last 10 years, some things have really changed down there. There's a lot more residential area right on the park. There's a new library with more than twice the number of users than we originally have. There's more library programs that can spill out of the library. We now have a successful Farmers Market downtown. We have more retail on Front. More demand for organized sports than ever.

Q: Are there any untouchable features down there?

Bloem: One of guiding principles for McEuen Field is that anything we move has to be rebuilt to the same value or better somewhere else. The park has to remain green space. We couldn't make that property commercial or put big structures on it, if we wanted to -- and we don't -- because of the recreation funding that built it.

Q: How long is this process going to take?

Bloem: The process will begin with community meetings. It will take at least a full year of intense planning, to address questions like underground parking.

