



Everett Chooses Riverfront Team California Company will Develop Mill Site

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EVERETT - The Everett City Council has chosen San Diego-based developer OliverMcMillan as a partner on its riverfront development project.

The unanimous vote came at the conclusion of a five-hour meeting Wednesday at which the council heard from three nationally known developers.

Kevin Haley, OliverMcMillan's development director, said after the meeting that he was pleased with the council's decision.

"It's great to have a formal engagement," Haley said. "We've been dancing and dating for about a year."

The company will develop about 100 acres of land between I-5 and the Snohomish River. City leaders envision a "lifestyle center" on what was once home to the Simpson-Lee pulp and paper mill and a landfill. They hope for retail, restaurants, entertainment, recreation, housing and possibly a college. OliverMcMillan, which has about 40 employees, has made about 10 trips to Everett since learning of the riverfront property's availability.

Haley and CEO Dene Oliver said the company will begin work right away promoting the Snohomish River site, working with the city on a development agreement and opening an office in Everett. "We're going to work hard to make sure you made the right decision," Haley said. "Everett's a great site - a community on the rebound."

City Council members said it was a tough decision. Members said they were impressed by all three presentations and appreciated the strength and quality of each company. "All things being equal, you go with your feeling, I guess," council President Marian Krell said. Krell said she went back and forth nearly every day leading up to the decision. In the end, it was OliverMcMillan's unique approach, enthusiasm and creativity that pushed the company ahead, she said. "They want to move in here with us and live with us for a while," Krell said. "We would be their focus."

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Councilman Drew Nielsen, a lifelong Everett resident, said Wednesday's decision portends well for the future. "Everett is clearly transforming ourselves," Nielsen said. "I remember the excitement when we got our first McDonald's."

Resident and riverfront activist Michele Hoverter was thrilled at the council's selection. "The other developers all had some good ideas, but OliverMcMillan really went out of its way to show pictures of Everett," Hoverter said. "Their projects have a design sense and scale that fit into the communities they build them in."

Another resident and riverfront activist, Gail Chism, said she hopes the Lowell neighborhood, which is adjacent to the riverfront, will be included in the decision making. "I think that Lowell is the best kept secret, and I don't want people to love us to death," Chism said. "But I'm open for some things on the landfill site."

Oliver told the council during his presentation that Everett's riverfront would be the company's top priority. It also will look for extensive public involvement, Oliver said. He and his team are a "unique boutique," he said. They're more likely to call what they do "place making" than "real estate developing."

"The art of place making ... is more important than money making," Oliver said. The company's goal, he said, would be to create a project budget that requires no additional investment from the city beyond the riverfront property itself.

The city and the developer are expected to work out a development agreement by the end of the year. If all goes well, there could be some drawings and concepts of the site by early 2006. OliverMcMillan said they'd also want to "surcharge" the landfill site as soon as possible -weigh it down with dirt so the ground sinks now rather than when buildings are on it.

The company will also work to promote the Everett project. It will assemble a team of national talent, but also the "best and brightest" of local and regional companies. "We will be a great partner long-term," Oliver said. "We wouldn't be here if we didn't believe we could make the project happen."

Council members' comments on the developers were markedly positive. That's is because Everett may want to work with the other developers in the future, said Lanie McMullin, the city's executive director. "I've shown each of the developers around the city. They didn't just look at the riverfront," McMullin said. "I'll be contacting them again, all of them, about projects in our great city."

Mayor Ray Stephanson, who is vacationing in Hawaii with his family, missed the meeting. He was briefed by phone. "I think OliverMcMillan are true visionaries in development and creating this sort of sense of place that is important to all of us on the riverfront," he said. "I got the sense from our visit that they take that objective very seriously, and that's exactly what we want for the riverfront."

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OliverMcMillan The Glen Town Center in Glenview, Ill., is one of OliverMcMillan's projects. The 1,200-acre community was built at the former site of a naval air station near Chicago.

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