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Neighbors see chance to reshape Albina Fuel site

A deal for the property falls through, raising hopes that a "conceptual study" will improve the neighborhood

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The collapse of a potential real estate deal for development of the Albina Fuel site has the property owner searching for a new buyer and neighbors hopeful that they might help shape development on the 5-acre industrial property at Northeast 33rd Avenue and Broadway. Neal Arnston, president of the family-owned Albina Fuel Co., which has owned the land in Sullivan's Gulch for 93 years, said he hopes redevelopment will improve the neighborhood.

"I think our current status here is a real obstruction to any redevelopment of Broadway," Arnston said.

The property, which slopes down from Broadway south to Interstate 84, is used for company offices and for parking and maintenance of fuel tanker trucks. Milliken Development Corp. of Vancouver, B.C., began work last spring on plans for high-rise residential towers, shops and possibly

a YMCA branch on the Albina property. After Milliken pulled out, Arnston said, he began talking with other developers.

Last summer, the Sullivan's Gulch Neighborhood Association launched what it calls a "broad-brush conceptual study" of how development on the Albina site might inspire larger improvements. The study, financed with a \$60,000 grant from the state, focused on traffic, public transportation and walkways in the area.

"We wanted to try to think, 'Can we create a main street on Broadway that serves the people that live here?'" said Lynne Coward, who oversees land use for the neighborhood association.

Fred Meyer arrived in mid-'80s Grant Park, Irvington, Laurelhurst and Kerns neighborhood association members participated in study workshops. Many of the associations are presenting the plan to their members this month, Coward said.

Sullivan's Gulch requested grant money for the study after the Portland City Council approved a zone change for the Albina parcel last spring. The urban design firm Crandall Arambula conducted the study, which outlines several suggestions for reducing traffic and making Broadway more pedestrian-friendly.

The property is the last remnant of an industrial area that once covered more than 20 acres between Sullivan's Gulch and Broadway west of Northeast 33rd Avenue. When Albina sells its land, it will move its operations to another property.

In the mid-1980s, Fred Meyer built a large store on much of the industrial land. Neighborhood associations for Sullivan's Gulch and adjacent Grant Park opposed the Fred Meyer development, and some neighbors still complain that the neighborhood cannot handle the traffic the store generates.

"As a result of our experience with Fred Meyer, some people were concerned about the impact of this new development, and that was part of our motivation for the grant," said Dave Brook, Sullivan's Gulch Neighborhood Association president.

European-style street The study envisions a European-style main street section of Northeast Broadway, from Northeast 28th Avenue to 33rd, with more street trees and slip roads — separate lanes on each side of the main thoroughfare for parking and slower, business-bound traffic. The plan also suggests traffic-flow changes, a new light-rail stop and an extension of Northeast 32nd Avenue around the back of Fred Meyer to connect with Northeast 28th Avenue.

Fred Meyer officials were skeptical that a road extension through their property behind the store would leave enough room for freight trucks.

"We're willing to listen to any proposals, but they need to maintain the car and truck access we need to operate the store," said Rob Boley, a Fred Meyer spokesman.

Any new MAX light-rail stop would require a lot more research, said Phil Selinger, a TriMet project planning director.

Those recommendations are not binding for prospective developers, but Coward said they could help guide discussion in the design-review process. Arnston said that while he supports looking at ways to reduce congestion, he will put no conditions on how the property is developed.

"We are keeping our options open and looking at all of the potential we can for the property," Arnston said. Jeanne Harrison, a city senior transportation planner, said the study's suggestions were creative and could improve the neighborhood.

"It's got some very good ideas in it, but whether they would all work is going to depend in part on what development comes in on the (Albina) site," she said.

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