

What's Coming Up in Downtown Eugene?

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Downtown is everybody's front yard. It's the area where private space intersects public space. The front yard makes a statement to the next-door neighbor, visitors passing by, and those in search of a new home. So it is with downtown Eugene. Like all downtowns, it is the public face of the community.

So what's springing up in the front yard? Digging has started on the Downtown Athletic Club to accommodate the swimming pool. Heavy equipment could soon move earth along Willamette Street to make way for the return of the automobile. Primroses are blooming near the Bookmark and Atrium.

The Vision

Downtown is a priority for the City Council, Downtown Commission, and Eugene Downtown Association. It is permanently planted in the Six-Point Economic Diversification Plan and the Eugene Agenda. The downtown vision integrates the energy and diversity of the city; its commercial, cultural, residential, governmental, recreational, and natural assets. Mike Schwartz, chair of the Downtown Commission and manager of M. Jacobs Fine Furniture, recently listed five projects which color the vision: the Downtown Athletic Club, street improvements, major retail development, downtown image development program, and a proposal for a major downtown hotel.

So you say downtown is a ghost town after five? The spirit's silence will be shattered with construction of the Downtown Athletic Club, a \$3.2 million development of the historic Ax Billy Building at the corner of 10th Avenue and Willamette Street.

The project will add a third story to the building to include a swimming pool, gymnasium, racquetball courts, weight and aerobic areas, sauna and other fitness features. The club is scheduled to open in December, 1985. In addition to rehabilitating a blighted historic building, the facility will operate from early morning through late evening. Events and activities which draw people downtown before and after traditional office hours is a strategy for making downtown a vital and alive place.

Access

Why is it so difficult to get there from here? Several projects address access to downtown. A design to open Willamette Street between 10th and 11th Avenues will be reviewed by the City Council April 8. The design converts the pedestrian only space to a two-way street, with a tree-planted median. The project also removes the cover at 10th Avenue and Willamette Street and improves the 11th Avenue surface parking lot. Eighteen on-street parking spaces will be added. The street character will be similar to Willamette Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. With council approval the project will be completed September, 1985.

The anticipated two-way conversion of Broadway between Oak and Pearl streets is a further effort to improve downtown access and circulation. Currently the Downtown Parking Program is being explored for efficient and cost-effective ways to meet the needs of those for whom downtown is a destination.

Major Retail

Others are firmly rooted in the belief that you can't get it downtown. The front yard vision includes major retail to complement activity of the Hult and Eugene Conference Center and future office development. Price Development Company is currently cul-



The intersection of 10th and Willamette, circa 1968, before the Mall was built. Nickles' Shoes was in the Ax Billy Building, soon to be the Downtown Athletic Club.

tivating the potential for an urban retail development of at least three major retailers, several smaller shops, theaters, restaurants and other activity generators. The development will be central to the surrounding neighborhoods, and other features distinct to downtown Eugene. Roger Neustadter, a member of the Downtown Commission and manager of Kaufman's, reminds us that the retail project is in a preliminary stage. "The City, developer, and major retail tenants must negotiate a development to meet varied and not necessarily mutual interests." A retail development appropriate for downtown Eugene is not the suburban model which sprouts in cornfields. The developer and City will continue to explore design, financing, and potential major tenants through September. At that point the reality of a Eugene project will be reviewed. Planning, design and construction is typically a three- to five-year process.

Image

The primroses are the sentinels of the Downtown Image Development Project.

The Three P Program: Painting, Planting and Policing, is how Jim Ivory, president of the Eugene Downtown Association, and owner of the Eugene Athletic Company, defines the project. The Eugene Downtown Association recently awarded a contract for painting several downtown buildings at a reduced cost to property owners. The Eugene Garden Club will color downtown with summer plantings. A Downtown Business Watch program modeled after the successful Neighborhood Watch is being coordinated by the Eugene Police Department. A "Downtown! All Dressed Up and Somewhere to Go" event is scheduled for May 18.

So you want to stay downtown? A new 250-room downtown hotel is a possibility. The discussion is preliminary; however, McClory Development Company has requested an exclusive agreement to explore the feasibility of a second major hotel. The potential development is planted in the downtown destination vision.

The vision is taking form. Downtown is more than a retail mall or urban park. It is our central neighborhood, our community frontyard.

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