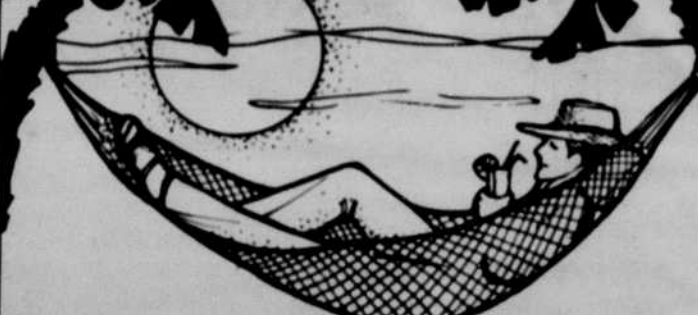


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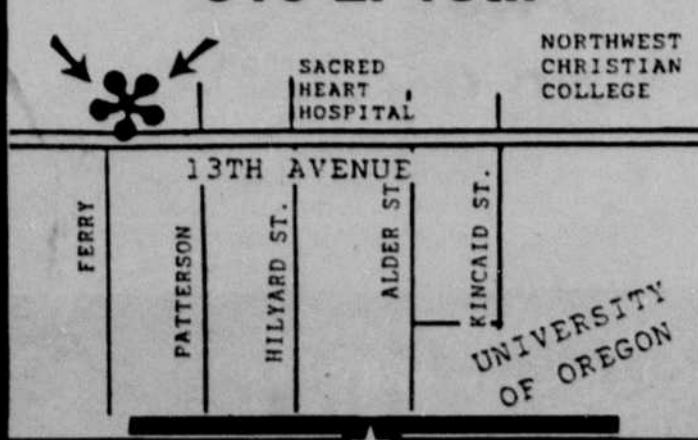
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Downtown Continued from Page 1

businesses while attracting new ones.

Weinman is quick to point out that under the proposed plan the street would remain "pedestrian-oriented," with "very narrow traffic lanes and very wide sidewalks."

"Cars and people really can mix well," Weinman said, and points to Eugene's Saturday Market and Seattle's Pike Street Market as examples.

Eugene Downtown Association President Mark Davis echoes Weinman's attitudes about the mall. "Right now the downtown is monolithic in its layout and it doesn't provide for the ability of customers to access it as easily as other commercial areas," he said.

The Downtown Association, representing downtown business interests, initially supported the proposed opening, but is currently re-evaluating its position in light of increased opposition from the business community.

That opposition is very vocal. A large banner reading "Keep Willamette St. Closed to Auto Traffic" hangs from the Aster Building on Eighth and Willamette streets, and dozens of storefronts along the street display posters against the proposal.

Many of those businesses exhibiting signs at their entrances are not convinced that allowing traffic on the mall would increase business or attract new businesses, and point out that the street is now enjoying a post-recession boom in activity.

"If we're successful the way we are, and there's nothing wrong with it, why fix it?" asks Scan Design Manager Charlie Fletcher.

Fletcher said he sees no evidence supporting the claim of increased business. "The overwhelming majority of our customers are telling us 'Don't open the mall,'" he said.

At least one store though,

Skeies Jewellers, found that the opening up of the mall between Tenth and Eleventh streets had positive results. Skeies' Manager Steve Hamaker said his business has increased by 25 percent since the street opened up to auto traffic. Also about 1 million dollars in private money was invested on the block after that portion of the mall was opened.

The argument to keep the mall closed, however, is not just about dollars and cents. Many fear the re-opening might ruin the unique flavor of downtown Eugene with traffic noise and exhaust, while demolishing the mall's function as a community gathering place.

Friends of Downtown, a group formed by citizens involved in the original creation of the mall believes the existing mall is a commercially viable and popular location.

The block's largest property owner, Aster Publishing company, objects to the plan on the grounds that traffic will spoil the working environment for its employees. "It's just a very pleasant environment. It's one of the reasons we located here," said Miltrud Burke, company spokeswoman.

Weinman admits that the mall environment is good for some types of businesses, but feels it is unfair "to design a street around a few businesses." He added Eugene has "several environments and one of them is certainly a good mall environment on Broadway, and if one of those stores — say Prince Puckler's — really wants to be on the mall, that prevents them from moving on to Broadway at a later time."

However hot the debate among businesses and city administrators becomes, neither of these forces will make the final decision. The City Council itself, sensing the strong public concern over the issue, may defer the question to voter

referendum before making a decision.

Recent straw polls of downtown visitors indicate that such a vote would be against the opening at this time. A written poll conducted by Prince Puckler's ice cream recorded 275 opposed with only 27 in favor of the reopening proposal.

Davis said he sees no rush to decide on the issue. "I don't think that the public has been given the chance and the opportunity to fully understand the project. I would hate to see a public vote happen in premature fashion," he said.

But Fletcher thinks that the City Council should put the issue to voters before proceeding any further.

"It would be completely irresponsible for them to just go ahead and spend the money and ramrod this program down our throats," he commented.

Conversely, Weinman thinks "design issues should not be taken to public votes. That's what you elect city councilors to do."

Regardless of whether the issue does go to a public vote, Eugene citizens on both sides of the issue will be able to make their voices heard at a public meeting on the issue on Monday, July 13. The hearing is open to the public and will take place at the City Hall Council Chambers on Eighth and Pearl streets at 7 p.m.

Et al.

Mortar Board Honor Society will meet Saturday, July 11 at 2 p.m. on the lawn between Fenton and Gilbert Halls.

Eugene Water and Electric Board is holding a public meeting on proposed electric rate hikes on Monday, July 13 at 7:30 in the EWEB main office at 500 E. 4th Avenue.

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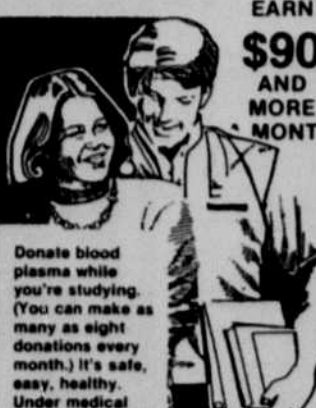
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