

COMMUNITY

Voters reject mall redesign plan

Measure fails by less than 3,000 votes

By Brian Bloch
Emerald Reporter

The polls were right: Eugene voters Tuesday defeated a measure calling for the redesign of the downtown mall.

Ballot Measure 20-02 was voted down by less than 3,000 votes in Tuesday's election, with an unofficial final count of 18,642 no votes to 15,978 yes votes.

The measure would have repealed a city ordinance that has kept the downtown mall free of traffic since the early 1980's. Under the measure, portions of Willamette Street, Olive Street and E. Broadway Street would have been opened to vehicular traffic.

Other modifications to the mall, including the creation of a new public plaza area, parking units and landscape upgrades, were included in the defeated measure.

Opponents of the measure voiced concerns during public meetings in February, saying vehicular traffic would damage the pedestrian-oriented atmosphere of the mall.

Other opponents cited the projected cost of the redesign, \$3.2 million, in contrast to tightened local government budgets under Ballot Measure 5.

Still others in opposition to the measure said merely opening the streets would do little to solve complex economic problems faced by downtown businesses.

"There are a lot of strategies

available for improving the downtown area," said Eugene City Councilor Paul Nicholson. "There is no evidence that opening streets helps downtown malls."

Nicholson said he expected the measure to be defeated and advocated the use of downtown funds for other options currently being considered by the city council. Those options, he said, include housing development, parking, library construction and new public plaza areas.

"Now that the public has resolved the issue of whether to turn to redesign as the answer, we can go forward with a more appropriate and effective strategy for improving downtown," Nicholson said. "Now we have that \$3.2 million to spend on other options."

In the wake of the defeat, he also called for "more conscientious" land use guidelines to be set up by the council.

"We have to look to exploit the natural advantages of that pedestrian area," Nicholson said.

The no-vote is in sharp contrast to predominant opinions expressed during public forums on the issue.

An overwhelmingly favorable crowd advocated the opening of downtown during a February 26 forum. Only ten people came out in opposition, although polls this month showed a shift of voter preference away from the downtown proposal.

A February survey of 82



Paul Nicholson

downtown businesses indicated that 67 supported the redesign proposal, said Gene Swan, president of the management firm Downtown Eugene Inc.

Proponents of the measure cited decreased business and a loss of vitality to the area under a closed street design.

"Closed streets are like closed doors," said Ali Lazar, owner of two downtown businesses.

"We need to take action and save downtown by opening the streets," said business owner Bob Rubenstein.

Other business owners in the downtown area lobbied heavily for the measure, including James Ivory, proprietor of Eugene Athletic, and Russell Brink, a representative from Downtown Eugene, Inc.

"Our downtown design is not going to solve all problems and address all issues, but it damn well is a start," Ivory said.

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