

Outlet plan makes good sense for city

Who doesn't complain about the Eugene downtown mall? In recent years, the mall has lost almost all its major businesses — including the Bon Marche, Sears and Newberry's. Walking by the few remaining stores can be eerily depressing, reminiscent of plodding through a ghost town.

These days, the public does its shopping at Valley River Center or Gateway Mall. Why? Because both offer a semi-efficient, clean environment in which to shop. People don't worry about unsavory citizens hanging out by their favorite store. The area is polished; no stores are boarded up. Parking your car is convenient, with lots located right next to the two shopping centers.

Eugene now has a chance to revitalize downtown, to give Valley River and Gateway a run for their money. The community should jump at the opportunity.

Greg and Erika Baker of Visions Development Inc. want to buy the empty Bon Marche building and convert it into a factory outlet center. It would house national retail outlet stores and offer brand-name products at substantial discounts. Similar outlets are located in Lincoln City, Bend and Troutdale, and all draw customers from miles around.

Factory outlets would be beneficial for that reason alone. Lincoln City, for example, draws tourists from hundreds of miles away, primarily because of the outlets. More tourists lead to more money, which benefits other businesses in the area, such as restaurants and shops.

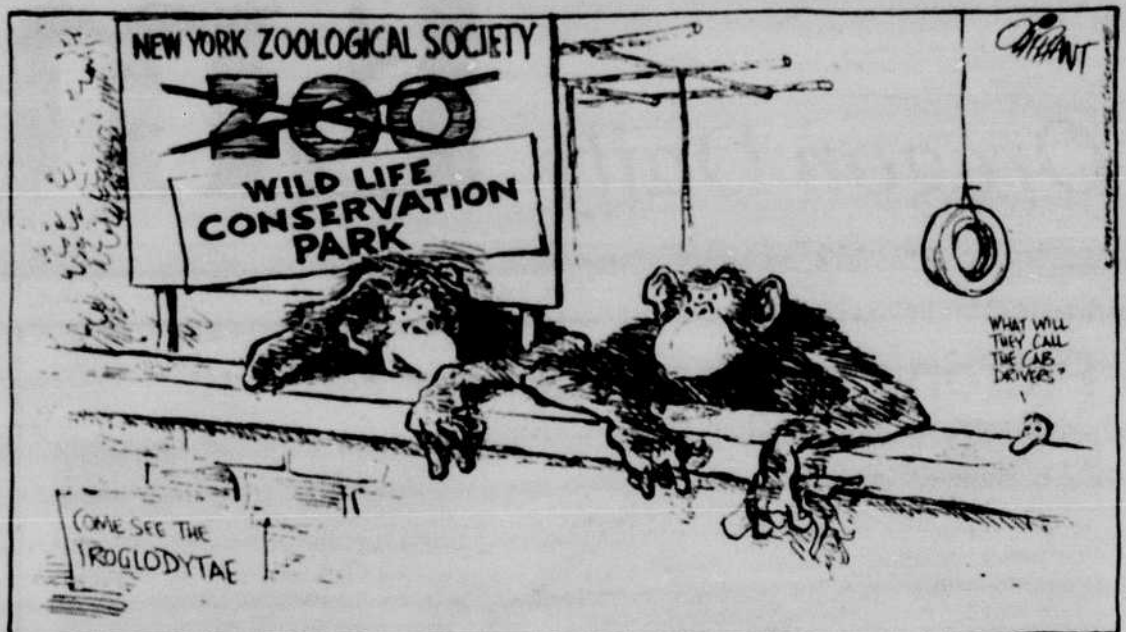
Downtown Eugene could desperately use that exposure. Remaining businesses would have a reason to stay, while new businesses would be enticed to move there. In addition, the project's developer estimated the center would create about 300 new jobs and an annual payroll of about \$4 million, further helping Eugene's economy.

The main snag is the developers want the City Council to pay for a parking garage at a cost of \$5.1 million. But the city has the money in urban renewal funds — money that is supposed to be spent on the city center. Because nobody has suggested any viable alternative uses, the council should take a chance and go ahead with the project. Eventually, the city will earn the money back from the shoppers who pay to park there.

The main argument against the development has come from citizens worried that increased traffic at the mall will turn Eugene into a California city. This development should not be shunned for such irrational fears. One factory outlet center will not destroy the local environment. It will be housed in an already constructed building and will, frankly, make an ugly area more attractive.

The City Council needs a vision for the mall's future. It can no longer afford to stall its way through development plans, as it has with the proposed library at the old Sears store. If Olive Street was allowed to open — a move that has of yet done very little for the mall — the council should definitely put its weight behind this plan.

The City Council needs a vision for the mall's future.



IT'S POLITICAL CORRECTNESS GONE MAD — THE OLD NAME NOW APPLIES TO THE REST OF THE CITY ONLY!

COMMENTARY

Conference embraced Middle East

By Alon Tal

It was an honor to be invited to participate in this year's Public Interest Environmental Law Conference to discuss the Environmental Aspects of the Middle East Peace Talks.

Indeed, the conference organizers went to extraordinary ends to include a session on the topic among the past weekend's eclectic and stimulating panels. Hence, the *Emerald's* decision to feature a commentary titled "Conference Ignores Middle East" in the Friday, March 5, edition was particularly inappropriate.

Beyond this fundamental inaccuracy, the commentary is so riddled with falsehoods that it is difficult to offer a reasonable rebuttal. Where does one start? Perhaps a few facts can set the record straight.

The underlying presumption of the article is that Palestinians in Israel constitute "indigenous people" exploited by Israelis who fit into some sort of "neo-colonialist" role. Yet anyone who has read the Bible knows the Jewish people lived in the Land of Israel thousands of years ago. Indeed, environmentalists know it was there they institutionalized sustainable agriculture with the sabbatical fallowing of fields, issued religious prohibitions against environmental destruction during wartime and lived a divine order to "Work and Protect" the Garden of Eden.

Substantively, M. Reza Behnam's commentary suggests that in utilizing water from the Mountain Aquifer recharged in the Judean hills, Israel is stealing the Palestinian West Bank's water. It is a pity that before repeating such tired propaganda, he didn't bother to check with any hydrologists. In fact the Mountain Aquifer, which provides a third of Israel's drinking water, represents a complex situation. Although 80 percent of the rainfall that recharges the Mountain Aquifer falls in the West Bank, the majority of the underground reservoir actually lies inside of Israel.

There is a legitimate debate as to how to divide the water. International law is not completely instructive on this subject, albeit the Helsinki Convention suggests theories about surface water stream flow should apply to

groundwater. In other words, just as Mexicans are not stealing U.S. water when they utilize the Colorado River, Israel is not stealing groundwater that flows from the West Bank. Indeed, the deep waters of the disputed Mountain Aquifer are ancient, evaluated by geo-hydrologists to be roughly 3,000 years old. Hence, even if criteria for water rights, Israel certainly has claims to proprietorship. It was when the rains fell during the days of King David that the West Bank was undeniably under Jewish sovereignty.

The commentary featured numerous other inaccuracies. Israeli agriculture was assailed as wasteful, as it was allowed "unlimited water." The fact is Israeli agriculture is the most efficient in the world, pioneering drip irrigation. Between 1970 and 1990, with no increase in water allocation, using the new drip technology, agricultural productivity doubled. Two years ago, after extensive drought, water quotas to agriculture were cut 40 percent across the board. It was a painful but necessary cut. As an environmentalist, I know there is ample reason to criticize Israeli agriculture. Use of the ozone depleting pesticide methyl bromide, or overfertilization and inadequate soil testing are two that bother me. But Behnam would do well to learn a little about Israeli agriculture before disparaging it.

Behnam also attacks the fact that Israeli military government sets water policies in the West Bank. Perhaps he needs to be reminded that in this year's national elections, the Israeli public threw out the old government because it wasn't moving expeditiously enough to end the military occupation and move the peace process into high gear.

Recently, the Israeli Hebrew University and Palestinian Maqdes Institute of Jerusalem convened a conference for water scientists in Zurich. With equal Israeli and Palestinian delegations, it was an apolitical attempt to talk about water in the region sensibly.

It was discouraging for those of us attending from Israel to find that the Palestinian Liberation Organization representative from Tunisia decided to attend the conference. As a result, under his watchful eye, almost all of the

Palestinian speakers felt compelled to begin their lectures with truculent lip service to the traditionally hostile Palestinian position.

Only in informal meetings in the corridors, away from the PLO big-brother presence, were more conciliatory positions offered. Israelis attending returned with a greater sense of the urgency that Palestinians feel toward their present inadequate water allocation. The water bureaucracy that is perceived as an irritation to most Israelis is perceived by Palestinians as an additional form of occupational oppression. Palestinians, I believe, came away with the sense that limiting the discussion to allocation of existing water sources will not serve their national needs.

Israeli and Palestinian environmentalists are hopeful the peace process can be leveraged to invest in water pollution prevention controls throughout the region. Despite the discomfort of the PLO leadership, discussions between local professionals are becoming more pragmatic and productive. We are going to work this thing out. Uninformed commentaries on the subject and repeating inaccurate propaganda cliches make for shoddy scholarship and lousy journalism.

I, for one, am grateful that the Public Interest Law Conference offered the opportunity to highlight this issue and the potential of the environment to facilitate reconciliation in a part of the world that has suffered from acrimony for far too long.

I go to many law conferences in Israel and Europe and tend to find them a little on the dry side. The approach of the Eugene Conference came as a total surprise, as it was remarkably fresh, vital and passionate. It reflects the idealism of students and faculty who organize it each year and the resourcefulness of this year's codirectors, Kari Grabowski and David Evans. Thanks to the wisdom encountered here, I will certainly return to Israel a more thoughtful and creative advocate for protecting the environment in Israel and the Middle East.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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