

COURTHOUSE HURDLES INCLUDE ACCESS ISSUES

The General Services Administration recently put the new federal courthouse project on hold, expressing concerns about the city's commitment to solving pedestrian access problems to the courthouse neighborhood.

The GSA's concerns may be well founded. City plans for the former Agripac Cannery site were heavily criticized for creating an isolated island surrounded by two rivers of impassable traffic that cut the area off from downtown and the river front.

The city plans to split Franklin Boulevard to flow around the site on either side by adding a new highway along the railroad tracks. City planners argue that the split will make it easier for pedestrians to cross the now impassable Franklin from downtown.

But when the plans went out for public hearings in 2001, critics said the solution would only make the problem worse. Scott Wylie, a local designer, compared Franklin to a "Mississippi River of traffic." If split, it will "become like two Columbia Rivers of traffic" and an even greater barrier, he said.

"We're creating more than one barrier," Planning Commissioner Art Farley agreed.

"It's absolutely horrible," said Councilor Betty Taylor of the plan to add another highway "too close to the river."

City planners have argued that adding the new highway could allow the city to eventually remove traffic lanes on Franklin to make the street less of a barrier. But there's no firm commitment to do so.

Highway traffic often expands to meet available capacity and state transportation

officials would likely veto any move to make Franklin smaller.

A solid council majority did vote to approve the plan for two highways around the courthouse, but the highway project likely lacks broad public support. A similar "Franklin Option" proposal as part of a Ferry Street Bridge corridor widening project failed at the polls in 1994 by a wide margin.

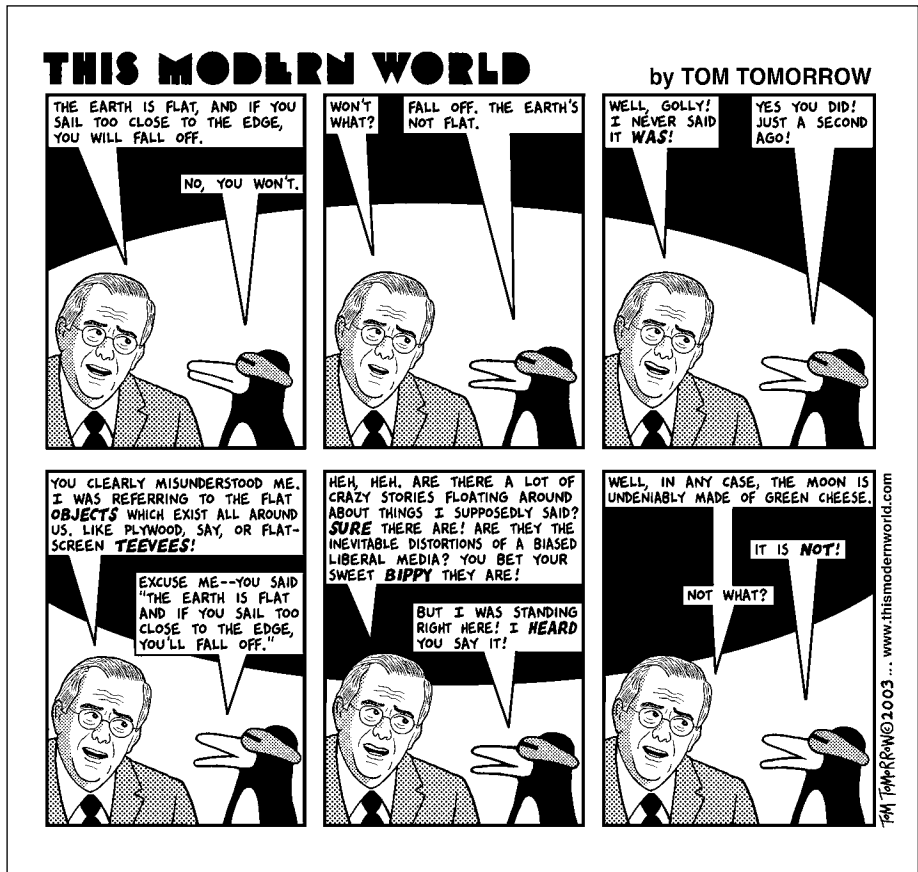
If the GSA uses the threat of canceling the project to extort more local taxpayer subsidies for the courthouse project, it will also likely meet public resistance. Urban renewal funding has been heavily criticized for diverting tax revenue from already struggling city and county services and state schools. Pressure is building for the city and county to use any available road fund money on street maintenance rather than trying to stick locals with higher taxes.

Diverting scarce local funds or increasing local taxes for a bond measure for infrastructure to serve the lavishly designed courthouse could also meet major opposition. — Alan Pittman

COUNCIL VOTES ALLOW SUBURBAN HOSPITAL

The Eugene City Council appeared to back away from siting a new hospital near downtown last week.

Last year a council majority moved to use zoning laws to prohibit a hospital in far north Eugene, but Sept. 24 the council voted 4-4 with Mayor Jim Torrey breaking the tie in favor of a resolution to "welcome" a new hospital nearly anywhere in the city. In another vote, the council decided 5-3 to move forward with a change in the city's zoning code to ease hospital siting.



The hospital zoning vote went against the recommendation of the city's Planning Commission. Eugene Planning Director Tom Coyle said McKenzie-Willamette/Triad officials had indicated that they favored the change in secret meetings.

But Councilor David Kelly said it "bothers" him that the hospital hasn't come to councilors directly or in testimony to request the zoning change. "We don't know yet if it's responsive to the hospital's needs, and it goes against the recommendation of our own Planning Commission."

The council votes make it easier for a new McKenzie-Willamette/Triad hospital to be built in far west or north Eugene, with high city transportation and infrastructure costs, leaving citizens with longer drives to the hospital after Sacred Heart leaves for Springfield.

The council did vote unanimously for a resolution offering unspecified monetary incentives and land assembly to help a hospital choosing to locate in the central city, south and west of the Willamette River and as far west as Bertelsen Road.

But support for the incentives for a downtown hospital did not appear strong. Councilor George Polling unsuccessfully urged the council to also give incentives north of the river. Mayor Torrey unsuccessfully

fully advocated giving incentives to smaller health care operations, a definition that could have led to the city giving money to Sacred Heart for moving its hospital to Springfield and leaving a clinic behind. — AP

EUGENE 'BURBS SITE OF PERMACULTURE GATHERING

Permaculture happens, whether it's in the country, the city or the suburbs, say organizers of this year's North West Regional Permaculture Gathering. The seventh annual event took place Sept. 12-14 in the River Road neighborhood rather than the rural settings of previous years.

The site was a 3/4-acre property with a large open-spaced studio as the focal point. An outdoor kitchen was constructed along with a straw bale amphitheater, open air living room, display area and kids' space. Several residential locations in the neighborhood were also extensions of the gathering.

"For some people, permaculture is mostly about growing food in an Earth-friendly way," says organizer Jan Spencer of the Eugene Permaculture Guild. "For others, permaculture is an umbrella term that covers a diverse range of issues and topics from food production to cooperative

Happening people BY PAUL NEEVEL



Mark Hansen

Since he moved to Eugene in 1979, Winston native Mark Hansen has become an enthusiast for wheelchair sports and a valued supporter of Mobility International USA. "I played rugby in Eugene from '92 to '97," he notes. "There's no Eugene team any more, so I go to Sunday practices in Salem." Hansen still plays and coaches rugby during the six months he spends with his sister in Tucson. He makes a circuit of tennis tournaments and coaches a promising young player in Eugene. MIUSA was founded in 1981 and Hansen served on its board of directors from 1985 to 2000. For 20 years he has played host to a multitude of foreign visitors, including guests from Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan currently here for the Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability. A few days ago, Hansen invited 25 friends to a "wrenching" BBQ – a work party to assemble wheelchairs from a pile of parts and garage-sale finds. Twenty newly rebuilt chairs will be sent off with visitors from Third World countries. "A lot of people are happy to bring a wheelchair back with them," says Hansen, who began restoring chairs in 2001. "It can be checked on the airline as baggage."

