

PETITIONS TAKEN OUT ON URBAN RENEWAL

A local citizen group opposed to the City Council's expansion and renewal of an urban renewal (UR) district along the Willamette River has filed to refer the issue to the voters. Organizers have less than four weeks to gather and submit 3,722 valid signatures.

Paul Nicholson and Howard Bonnett are the chief petitioners and Ruth Duemler is organizing the petition drive.

Duemler says the group is looking to get at least 4,500 signatures from 45 signature gatherers, and she's found 30 volunteers so far.

"This is the best chance we have to overturn this tax giveaway," says Duemler, noting that "schools and social services have been making cuts in essential programs."

The Riverfront UR District will divert an estimated \$40 million over the next 20 years in state and local revenues that support schools, health care, fire, police, parks and other government services, according to city documents. The city plans to use the diverted money to build a new highway near the river, a new police station downtown and subsidize developer projects along the Willamette including the UO's controversial Riverfront Research Park.

Local UO neighborhood activist Zach Vishanoff has also filed a separate petition. “Looks like we have dueling petitions,” he says. “I didn’t see anything being filed, so I went ahead. I’m ready to roll.”

Vishanoff plans to personally gather thousands of signatures around campus. But unless he combines with Duemler's group, the two petition drives may have to have their signatures counted separately.

Duemler herself is a veteran signature gatherer. She says she personally gathered 11,000 signatures for a forest initiative and organized a local group that gathered more than 30,000 signatures on a health care initiative. The deadline is more rushed on a referral, she says, but “we should make it.”

Duemler says citizens will be eager to sign and revoke urban renewal when they learn "it takes money away from social services and

everything else” to fund a “stupid road” too close to the scenic Willamette River.

Progressives on the City Council are split on whether or not the Riverfront UR District is a good idea for Eugene. One main sticking point appears to be questions about how the money will be spent.

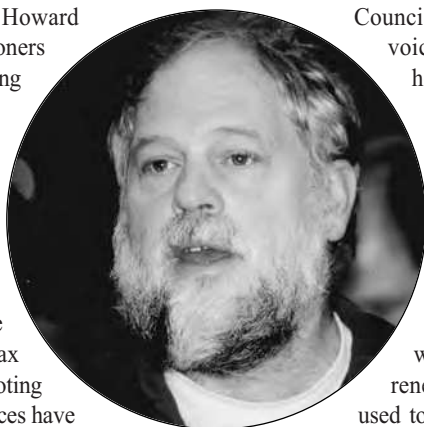
An e-mail debate on the topic has Councilor Bonny Bettman voicing concerns about how UR funds have been spent in the past, including the recent allocation of \$750,000 to fund planning for roads to serve traffic from the new federal building. She's also worried that the urban renewal money will be used to fund a state highway section north of the new federal building, creating more of a barrier downtown and the water.

Councilor David Kelly voted for the district and defends the need for the money. He notes the new public library was built with UR funds. "I am convinced that a healthy city needs a vibrant central city, and such a downtown is significantly cheaper to service in the long run than a city with less concentration of population and more sprawl," he wrote in an e-mail. "The experience of many cities (including Portland) is that it usually takes some economic muscle to kick-start redevelopment; urban renewal funds are one of the very few ways we can provide that muscle."

But opponents are saying UR is a discredited funding scheme, and that it has destroyed the historic character of downtown Eugene and actually hampered renewal. Weighing in on the virtual debate, Nicholson writes, "Property within the district has lost value in real dollars since the downtown urban renewal district was formed. It has underperformed virtually every other part of Eugene. Nor has the Riverfront Research Park delivered the benefits promised in exchange for purloining the taxes that should be supporting public services."

Kelly says UR is working well in Portland and the new Riverfront district requires council approval of any expenditures over \$250,000.

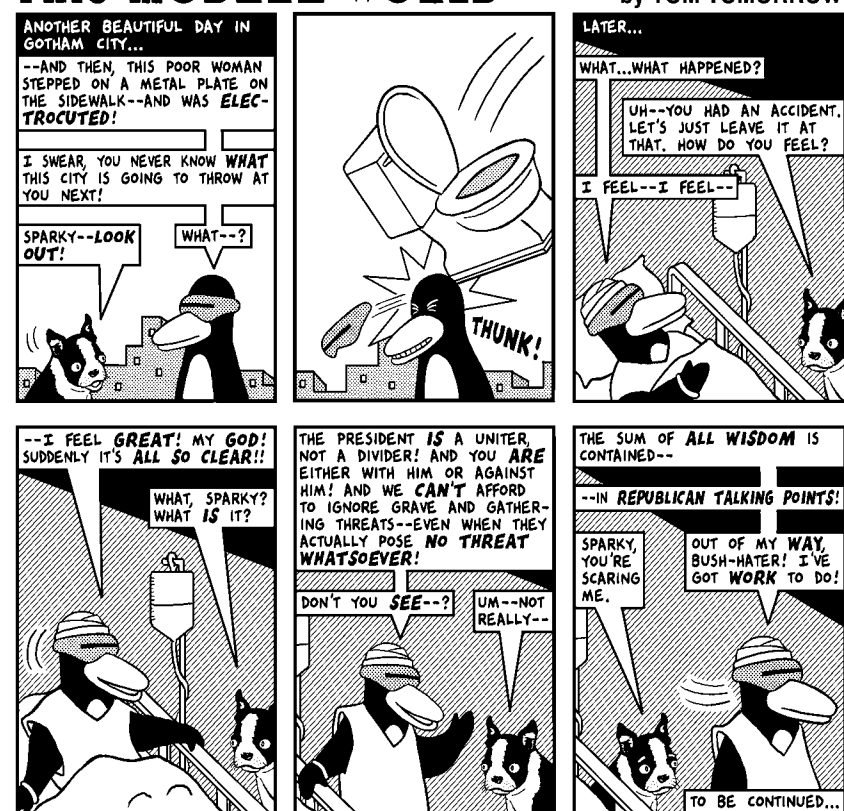
Petitions are available at Paul's Bicycle



PAUL NICHOLSON

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Way of Life and volunteers can call Duemler at 484-6145. — *TJT and AP*

BRIEF CASE 'TACKY,' SAYS VICKI ELMER

Responding to last week's news story on Eugene's city attorney and an amicus brief he wrote regarding a PeaceHealth and Springfield court case, former City Manager Vicki Elmer says, "I think it's tacky."

City attorney Glenn Klein has been criticized by city councilors and land-use activists for writing a legal document for the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) that is viewed as helping facilitate PeaceHealth's move to Springfield.

"Most city attorneys I know are scrupulous to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest," says Elmer. "Prudent city attorneys also don't put themselves in situations where a future conflict might arise. What if, for example, in the process of decommissioning the Eugene



VICKI ELMER

facility, or re-developing the property, PeaceHealth needs a permit or funding of some kind from the city, or litigation occurs — who will represent the city's interests then?"

Jan Wilson, an attorney representing CHOICES, one of the groups allied against Springfield and PeaceHealth in the appeals court case, says, "The conflicts of interest here are so apparent

that I can't even imagine how the attorneys involved could possibly think they could get away with this—they would never be allowed to do this in private practice."

Was Klein actually paid to prepare the brief on behalf of PeaceHealth and Springfield? Klein declined to answer questions about payment, but didn't deny being paid. According to Christy Monson, a staff member at LOC,

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- One of our news stories this week describes competing petitions on the referendum on the Riverfront Urban Renewal District. Sounds like the two groups, who have the same goal, are not communicating well with each other. The obvious Eugenean solution here is to join forces and circulate just one petition.
- Judge Ted Goodwin of the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals came back to his alma mater, the UO Law School, last week to talk mostly to law students. When asked about “activist” judges, the senior judge said “activist judges” is a term “loosely used by people who disagree with a judicial opinion.” He didn’t say it, but he could have advised his law school audience to watch for that term used over and over in President Bush’s pronouncements. Goodwin told a questioner he is not in favor of breaking up the Ninth Circuit and that the “heavy energy for that split is coming from the extractive industries in the northern states of the circuit.” When asked about the reversal rate for the circuit, he said “the batting average is pretty good ... I think it is mostly cocktail talk at bar association meetings that the Ninth Circuit is reversed so much.” He wrote the opinion that would remove “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance. He expects the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on that opinion in the next few months.
- Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and high commissioner of human rights for the U.N., recently told a packed ballroom in the EMU that “the worst abuse of human rights is absolute poverty.” In her gentle Irish accent, this tough woman talked about the “core of shared values” that a world connected by technology must have. She emphasized that “no sustainable development is possible without human rights.”

- We're slowly unraveling the mystery of who's doing what in the newsroom at the *R-G*. But if you're colorblind you might have trouble following this. Christian Wihtol is heading up the Blue Team covering city and county government, growth, timber, environment and development. The Black Team under Jim Murez is a peculiar combination of columnist Bob Welch and cop and court reporters. Margaret Haberman's Green Team has a pack of general assignment reporters or "rovers" fetching news. The Purple Team under Mark Johnson covers food, entertainment, arts and culture. Diana Elliot's Red Team covers education, health care and state government. So, will *Oregonian*-style team reporting be an improvement over old-fashion news beats and hierarchy? We'll see. We suspect the motivation is to provide broader coverage with fewer people. But hard-hitting stories are most likely to come from iconoclastic journalists spending years doggedly working beats, playing hooky from endless staff meetings.
- Michael Scarpitti, aka Tre Arrow, was nabbed in British Columbia this week. The activist with Eugene connections is wanted as a suspect in arson and vandalism cases, and yet the local daily and broadcast media are labeling him an "ecoterrorist" suspect. This persistent and inaccurate term fed to the media by federal agents and conservative politicians implies that environmental activists who commit property damage are equivalent to mass murderers. Let's save the "terrorist" label for those who plot mayhem on civilian populations.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519.