

news Briefs

URBAN FARMING

On a formerly vacant lot on Cheshire Avenue and Lawrence Street, community volunteers have transformed a small mountain of dirt into a historical farm in Skinner Butte Park: Skinner City Farm (SCF).

The site is rich with history. In pre-colonial times, the area was a wet prairie containing camas, a food source for Native Americans. In 1847 — with advice from local Native Americans to build above the floodplain — Eugene and Mary Skinner constructed their cabin just one block from the present-day farm. The city included the site in its 1914 dedication of Skinner Butte Park, a 100-acre open space along the Willamette River.

In 1997, Chambers Construction used the two-acre site to dump backfill from the

Broadway Place development. “It was one of the biggest piles of dirt you’ve ever seen,” says SCF founder and Center for Appropriate Transport (CAT) director Jan VanderTuin.

VanderTuin pulled together a group of Whiteaker neighbors interested in turning the space into a community asset. They pressured the city to remove the backfill and brainstormed possible uses for the site. Revitalizing the site’s historical value, providing food for local residents and creating an opportunity for youth education were high on their list. In 2002, the city accepted the SCF proposal as part of the Skinner Butte Master Plan.

The SCF board raised more than \$35,000 in city and community funds to start the project. Students from the Northwest Youth Corps, the Lane Metro Youth Corps and CAT’s alternative education program provided most of the volunteer labor. They built a “living” fence around the site, installing native plants on the outside and edible plants on the inside, and constructed an industrial-size worm composting system that processes food waste from local restaurants.

The farm contains two sections of community garden plots. Five local nonprofits sponsor organizational plots for low-income families and youth, and individual plots, at



Volunteer Alfred Coutts works the compost pile at Skinner City Farm.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



\$60 each, are available through the city.

The Skinner City Farm will host a grand opening on Sunday, June 12, from 1-4 pm. The event is free to the public. Organizers will unveil the farm’s four gates, which local artists designed and built. Native American, African American and European American community members will offer historical perspectives on the site, and local bands will provide live music. — Kera Abraham

MANAGER REJECTS COP REFORM

Eugene City Manager Dennis Taylor has come out against external, independent review of complaints against police.

Taylor wrote to the Eugene Police Commission May 17 opposing a police oversight model that would have the elected city council appoint and supervise an external auditor and citizen review board. Instead, Taylor wants to appoint an internal police auditor and review board himself.

The internal auditor “should be appointed by, and report to, the city manager,” Taylor

wrote. The board should also be “appointed by the city manager” and “essentially be acting as agents of the city as opposed to as a public board.” The board and auditor would have no power other than advising the manager and police chief about complaint issues.

The system proposed by Taylor would differ little from the current system under which he appoints the police chief to manage complaints against police. The current system resulted in a crisis of public confidence in the police department after officer Roger Magaña was convicted last year of raping and/or sexually abusing a dozen women. Magaña trained officer Juan Lara, who was also convicted of sexual crimes. Sexual misconduct complaints about Magaña reached back almost a decade, but the EPD did nothing.

It’s unclear how Taylor’s system would inspire much public confidence in the police complaint system because much of it would remain secret. It’s unclear even if the city would allow the citizen complainant to appeal a rejection of his or her complaint to the manager’s review board. “This may require a change to the collective bargaining agreement, which could only be accomplished

SLANT

- The city of Eugene got sued on racial profiling last week, with Cortez Jordan filing a \$1 million lawsuit for being stopped by police after leaving a dance club. The city has known for decades that it has a problem with cops racial profiling, but has done little to nothing about it. A decade ago a jury awarded \$20,000 in a similar racial profiling case. But three years ago, the city released data showing that cops stop blacks at more than twice the rate as whites. We hope some serious changes come from this new lawsuit.

- Citizens for Public Accountability has reached its 10-year anniversary. Together with Friends of Eugene, CPA has become a leading voice for environmental and taxpayer protection. But these groups have struggled for years with bare bones budgets. Meanwhile the city has heavily subsidized one of their leading opponents, the local pro-tax break and anti-environmental regulation

Metro Partnership. Why do the pro-corporate and developer lobbyists get their salaries subsidized by taxpayers while the public interest non-profits are forced to rely on rummage sales?

- Under a new mayor and council, Portland just became the first city in the country to offer taxpayer money for candidates in primary and runoff races. That means developers won’t be able to buy local government and candidates won’t have to squander their time and pride raising private donations. How about Eugene being the second city? Probably would be another 4-4 vote in our council with Mayor Kitty Piercy breaking the tie. That’s good enough for us: 5-4 for big money out of local politics.

- One of Eugene’s more creative thinkers and doers, Terry McDonald, tossed out a challenge to the business community last Friday at the City Club. He said leaders of local

businesses employing about 50 to 100 employees should “band together” to provide health care, perhaps under the umbrella of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce. If the chamber can’t do this, McDonald suggested that interested business leaders meet with him at St. Vincent de Paul to seek what he calls short-term solutions to the health care crisis in Eugene. With 25,000 uninsured employees in Lane County, McDonald says “we don’t have the freedom to wait for state or federal action.” That’s an invitation that should be accepted. If anybody can scrape together a solution for the thorniest problem in this town, it’s Terry McDonald.

- It’s good to see Eugene’s environmental majority has finally crawled out from under the thumb of the timber barons. The Eugene City Council voted 7-1 on May 23 to pass a resolution opposing old-growth logging in the McKenzie watershed.