

Selling Out to Whole Foods?

Local businesses deserve a level playing field.

Whole Foods Inc., an Austin, Texas-based juggernaut, recently revealed an interest in locating in downtown Eugene.

Proponents claim the project won't involve a subsidy to Whole Foods Market. However, it does involve swapping city land for land that the Shedd Institute for the Arts owns and then building a parking structure.

Whole Foods Markets is supposed to pay a fair price for the parking it uses, but if Whole Foods pulls out, the citizens may still be stuck with a parking structure we don't need. In addition, Eugene will abandon long-standing plans to use the land for other purposes and will allow a private corporate project to dictate the timing and nature of a major public capital project. Furthermore, the city is already considering using urban renewal funds, property taxes diverted from the general fund and state school taxes, for street and other improvements to support the project. I call that a subsidy.

So why do somersaults to attract Whole Foods Market? Is it to help Eugene's economy? Don't believe the propaganda that Whole Food's competitors will not be harmed. The average Whole Foods Market does more than \$19 million in sales annually. Other whole food stores, bakeries, coffee shops, restaurants, and grocers face the peril of a large corporate competitor.

Unlike manufacturers, call centers, and research institutes, new retail stores don't usually create new jobs. In fact, this supermarket will probably hire one new employee for each two jobs lost. This national chain will surely buy less from local suppliers and more from their corporate brethren, threatening more local jobs.

Well then, perhaps the council and mayor are trying to "save the downtown?"

Our planners, and our elected officials have been preaching the gospel of urban density for decades. But a typical Whole Foods Market is a big box store. You won't hear anything about the residential units on the top five floors, because there won't be any upper floors.

The Chamber of Commerce propaganda machine is already in high gear, and the R-G has predictably jumped on board in support. The Whole Foods Market development can be added to the long list of other ill-advised proposals R-G pundits have advocated in the past:

- **The Downtown Pedestrian Mall:** Based on a model that had already failed in Kalamazoo, Mich., and New Bedford, Mass., it failed predictably.
- **The Hilton Hotel and Convention Center:** Cost us a lot of money, and hasn't saved downtown.
- **The Downtown Athletic Club:** Diverting block grant money intended for the urban poor to an exercise club for the rich has not saved downtown.
- **The Downtown Clearcut:** Shoppers didn't like the downtown mall any better without trees than with them.
- **The Pankow Project:** Dispatched by the voters.
- **The Downtown Outlet Mall:** The idea was abandoned after the discovery that the developers were con artists just released from prison.
- **The Riverfront Urban Renewal District:** After 15 years and \$3 million, we still haven't seen any of the 900 new high-tech jobs promised.
- **The Semantec Giveaway:** Semantec left for Springfield the day after its tax abatement expired.
- **The Downtown six-lane Super Highway / Coburg Road / Ferry Street Bridge Project:** Fortunately defeated by the voters.
- **The Downtown De-Mall:** Why did we spend \$50 million on the mall?

Some of these ideas might have worked if carried out as part of a comprehensive, long-term plan. But past councils and mayors have been buffaloed into one ad hoc tax-subsidized scheme after another on the false premise that any project is a good project so long as it benefits development and construction interests. Reinventing or reinterpreting city plans to accommodate every private project has made Eugene's downtown an undeniable under-performer. These schemes have cost tens of millions of tax dollars and resulted in a downtown without focus, character or charm.

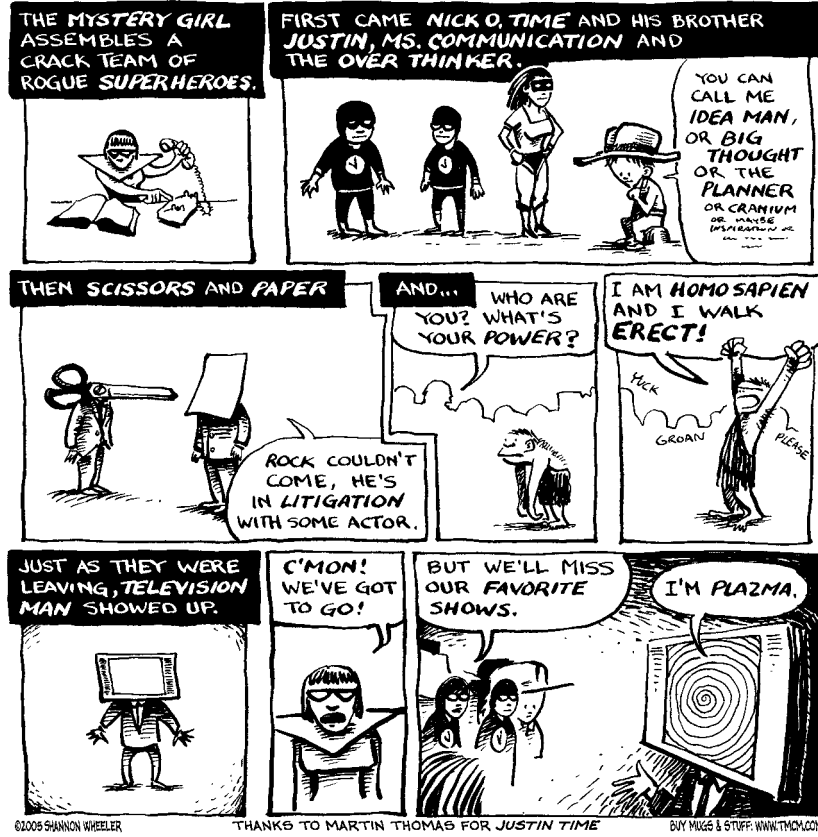
By contrast, Corvallis passed up the big urban renewal projects and has generally avoided big commercial projects. Having forgone the public expense of making a complete mess of its downtown, Corvallis has been rewarded by a vibrant downtown with successful retailers and rising values.

I asked the mayor and City Council to stop diverting taxes from school children and our general fund to advance private retail projects, to desist from the ad hoc planning that has ruined our downtown, and to stop discriminating against local businesses. I urge you to add your voice to mine.

Paul Nicholson is a local small business owner and former city councilor.



TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUE POLITICS

I was glad to see Josh Welch's Viewpoint piece (6/3) about the morning-host conservatism on Eugene's supposedly progressive radio station, KOPT 1600 AM.

Though I haven't heard the particular program that Welch writes about, I'm concerned about a related kind of conservatism on KOPT, namely its top-of-each-hour peddling of CNN's radio "news" service. Day after day, week after week, KOPT/CNN's radio news is suffocatingly devoid of any real content. It avoids even momentary discussions of our day's vital national or international political controversies, except for occasional uncritical propagations of Bush sound-bites.

Instead, we're given a diet of mindless, meaningless updates about a missing blonde in Aruba or a five-cent fluctuation in the price of gas. This is a classic tactic of the right-wing corporate media: Keep the population ignorant and distracted with a parade of shiny, meaningless info-baubles so we don't think about anything that matters. Many of KOPT's nationally syndicated commentators rightly denounce this kind of perversion of the news media, yet with KOPT's own news, Arlie & Co.'s Churchill Communications brazenly perpetrates it at the top of each hour.

The Air America station up in Portland has no problem airing substantive and responsible news. But Arlie & Co.'s Churchill Communications can't do the same on KOPT. Why not? Because their true politics are showing where it matters most?

*Carl Samuels
Eugene*

DANGEROUS IDEAS

I would like to comment on the Viewpoint by Chris Calef, published in your June 9 issue. This viewpoint has more falsehoods than I have room to note. He said that Jeff Luers received a sentence exceeding that of most murderers. That is not true, as since Measure 11 was passed, the *minimum* sentence for murder is 25 years, two years longer than Luers' arson sentence.

Calef attempts in every way to minimize

Luers' crime, by saying that no one was hurt, and only three SUVs were destroyed. He fails to note that Luers attempted a much larger arson than what occurred. If he had succeeded in burning the lot of SUVs, he would have caused a fire so large as to threaten the nearby homes in the neighborhood. It was only Luers' ineptness as an arsonist that prevented a more dangerous scenario. Fires are unpredictable and easily get out of control.

More disturbing than his false allegations of political persecution of this violent man are Calef's attacks on peaceful democratic political action as ineffective, and his clear endorsement of an anarchist philosophy. Such thinking is dangerous and a real threat to our community, for it can be used to justify increasing violence. It is obvious that this arson accomplished nothing to stop the use of SUVs. Following Calef's logic, that means that even greater violence should follow. And that is simply unacceptable to our peace-loving community.

*Lance Jacobs
Springfield*

NOT SO SIMPLE

Having worked locally at Sundance, Oasis, a Fred Meyer nutrition center and Wild Oats, I can unequivocally state that none of them were pro-union. As far as I know, none of the locally owned health food stores are unionized, and in fact, usually offer low wages and poor, if any benefits. So whatever the issues may be regarding Whole Foods' arrival in Eugene, please don't romanticize the locally owned health food stores. They would better serve this community by putting their money where their politically correct rhetoric is and pay living wages and decent benefits to their workers.

*Francie Killian
Springfield*

REAL WARS

Lois Wadsworth did an excellent review of *Star Wars III* (5/26). While I used to be a big fan of science fiction, I'm proud to say I haven't seen any of the three movies. I don't like real wars and I hate the criminals who start