

Bringing Downtown Up

Big downtown redevelopment proposal generates hopes, questions.

A \$165 million proposal to redevelop four blocks of West Broadway could revitalize Eugene's long-suffering downtown with a new movie theater, stores, restaurants, hotel, offices and condos.

"This is a very positive proposal, though just a proposal," said Mike Sullivan, a development manager with the city of Eugene.

Indeed, much about the proposal by local developers Tom Connor and Don Woolley and the Opus Development corporation remains unresolved. Here's a run-down of some of the key issues, hurdles or questions the development will face:

Parking — Connor-Woolley-Opus (CWO) say they need 743 new parking spaces for their development. About half of the new construction CWO proposes appears to be garages. A massing plan shows small shops and condos wrapped around three sides of three new, five-story parking garages along Broadway. CWO wants the city to pay for 455 of the garage spaces. But is so much parking actually needed? CWO estimates for the new parking need appear to be based on formulas for suburban shopping malls. Downtown Portland developers demand less than half as much parking per square foot. The proposal accounts for some existing garages but doesn't factor in several nearby existing parking garages and surface lots with unused capacity. It also doesn't factor in the easy transit provided by the adjacent LTD central bus terminal, serving 10,000 people a day. Too much parking could create congestion and defeat the planning purpose of promoting alternative transportation through a dense, walkable, livable downtown.

on the condos for 10 years, a tax break of roughly \$15 million based on tax rates and the project description. In addition, CWO says they want to buy the Atrium office building from the city. That could involve millions more in subsidies if they don't pay for the full market price of the building and

and the district could be underfunded because of CWO's 10-year tax break. Is the proposal worth a total of about \$40 million in taxpayer subsidies?

Condemnation — CWO would like the city to condemn private property for their development. Owners of Lazar's Bazar, Luckey's Tavern and the former Café Paradiso building, have so far declined to sell at the price CWO has offered. But the City Council appears split down the middle on the controversial idea of taking property for a private development. The local stores

a diversity of businesses and property owners as a key strength of successful downtowns and what makes them more interesting and attractive than shopping malls. But the CWO proposal would consolidate a large, key chunk of downtown under single ownership. "The snazzy chain-store shopping experiences are basically a dime a dozen," Friends of Eugene President Kevin Matthews told the council, criticizing the "horrible feeling" of finding the same corporate development in very different cities. "How many blocks can you have in one ownership and not have it become generic?"

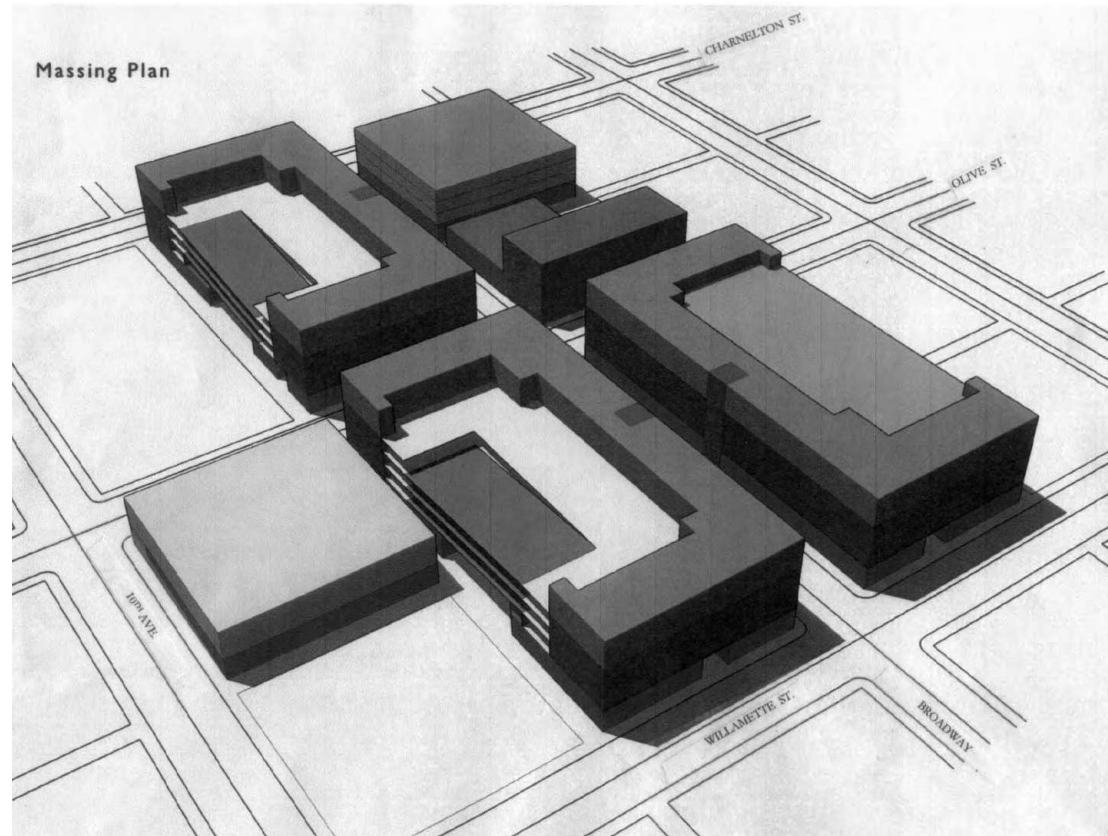
Character — CWO say they'll offer a mix of local and corporate chain stores. But it's unclear what that mix will be and how the development will reflect the interesting character of Eugene and offer more than low-wage retail jobs.

Commitment — Developer Ed Aster tore down the Woolworth's building for a redevelopment and left nothing but a gaping hole for a decade. Will CWO tear downtown down and then also fail to follow through? They've already been sitting on many of the vacant buildings downtown for years without recruiting tenants or investing in upgrades, helping to cause some of the blight problems they now propose to solve, critics say.

Despite the many unresolved issues, the majority of the City Council appear supportive of the CWO proposal. The council didn't commit to supporting the proposal until it sees further details, but voted 6-2 to pursue further discussion with the developers, with Bettman and Betty Taylor opposed.

Councilor George Poling voiced strong support. "This is a project that will basically change the face of downtown."

Councilor David Kelly agreed. "The proposal has a lot of exciting potential for downtown." **EW**



A rough plan submitted by CWO shows three, five-story parking garages wrapped on three sides with condos and shops, a hotel on Olive Street and a new 1,600-seat movie theater across from the LTD downtown bus station.

cover city office relocation and subsequent rent costs. The Downtown Urban Renewal district could help pay for the parking. The

CWO wants condemned "have been very loyal to downtown," Councilor Bonny Bettman said. "I can't agree with disposing of them for a large development."

Viability — A similar city/private development down the street at Broadway Place has struggled to fill ground-floor retail space. CWO could face the same challenges, but the scale of the development and new housing could produce a critical mass that would overcome downtown's historic problems with high vacancy rates.

Homogenous — Many planners view

Is the proposal worth a total of about \$40 million in taxpayer subsidies?

Taxpayer subsidy — The 455 city parking garage spaces could cost taxpayers about \$22 million. In addition, CWO would likely demand that it pay no property taxes

district diverts taxes from cash-strapped school and government services to fund projects downtown. But the spending limit on the district will likely have to be raised

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