

Goddess of Library Square

A modest place for Aurora to soak up the sun

Abronzed Eugene Skinner looked up from his log at the front the Eugene Public Library, looked north across 10th Avenue toward his namesake butte, and this is what he saw. It wasn't the biodynamic fountain or the statue of the goddess that caught his eye but the space itself, Library Square, a modest public square just opposite his perch. It had been carved out of the new buildings that were filled in all the way to Broadway.

He saw an arcade along the built edges of that square that spoke of passage in the rain and busy people entering and leaving the busy first floors and stores of the four- and five-story office and apartment buildings around the public space.

He saw a several-story-high indoor gallery entrance at the back of the square, an inner passage reaching through the middle of the block to Broadway, and he imagined the time when he might have walked from what he still thought of as 9th through that tall, narrow gallery and into the square, past the goddess and across the street to his library-log home.

And he liked the way the square fronted along 10th and Olive Street, and the way that Olive itself had become a wide-sidewalked, park-like corridor, connecting deeper into the downtown.

What Skinner thankfully didn't see was a parking structure looking back at him from the old Conner-Woolley proposal for Broadway, which had oriented a car wall facing back toward his perch. He knew it would have blocked all the good views of Spencer Butte for the new upper-story residents above the stores and shut out their southern sun.

Luckily the published diagram of that project had been conceptual and only temporary. Its point of course had been that the new multi-story buildings along Broadway needed convenient parking to back them up — but not literally at their very back the way it looked. And besides, it was more than Broadway that was at stake.

So, there had eventually come happier configurations that put some of the parking under the square, that took full advantage of the block's wide-angle exposure to the south hills landscape, and that helped to shape a new focal public space.

Now the new downtowners, high in their condos, were all warm smiles with good prospects as they looked out at the fir-covered hills and down at Library Square.

Skinner was pleased that those who had survived the down years of the downtown had been respectfully included in its redevelopment. And he felt proud that his town had finally created an urban design policy with a little dream in it, one that could tempt us with what he had called "the sweet fruit of public aspiration and the urban art of public possibility."

He had kept a log that summed up what he'd learned about cities: In addition to centers of commerce, they needed to be sensuously stimulating, socially supportive, environmentally healthy, pleasant, safe and just. While it might seem like his, Eugene City, he knew that it had to be built for all to share.

He liked that the area had been built up somewhat incrementally and didn't look so all at once and all of a kind. He liked that the materials, trees and the overall look of the place somehow said Northwest. He'd been surprised when someone had seriously proposed that a City Hall office tower take the place of the old Sears building on the square. He was pleased that there was still a place that had good acoustics (like the Atrium) for public music. He had been amused that the public planning process had slowly evolved into what one local wag had dubbed "a mixture of tops down and bottoms up."

And he especially liked the endless events programmed into the life of the new square. His favorite was the City Club sponsored summer tomato festival, where each member of the City Council was given a basket of ripe tomatoes and they would all pelt one another into a tomato-stained catharsis, a kind of interior clean slate that always launched the new political season. And he loved it when the surrounding residents would all throw flowers of appreciation (and an occasional lump of coal) from their balconies and the lush roof gardens that rivaled downtown San Francisco.

Dora Natella's 8-foot tall bronze statue of Aurora had been proposed for his signature location, but Skinner and his unassuming log were chosen in its stead. The wood-relief of "Aurora and the Elders" that had drawn a reflective pause at the landing on the old library's way upstairs now hung ironically in the lobby of the new parking garage below.

But happily that sexy goddess of the dawn had been recast. Her arms, now mythically outstretched, portended sun-filled new beginnings for the Broadway district, a library of light to share, a transportation hub, and a vibrant, public downtown center on the square.

Eugene Skinner was no bronze dummy. He'd heard of Aurora's legendary, umm, favors and wished that he were sitting closer at her side. He'd learned this lesson from Ms. Mary long ago. "Just treat 'em right and they'll name a town for you."

Jerry Diethelm is an architect and landscape architect and planning & urban design consultant.



children was freely admitted to by the central planners of schooling.

To trace this atrocity further back into history, you must research the kingdom of Prussia (Germany) during the 18th and 19th centuries. A key influence on the new system was Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who proclaimed, "The schools must fashion the person and fashion him in such a way that he simply cannot will otherwise than what you wish him to will."

*Ben Hollingsworth
Eugene*

NOTHING TO LOSE

I eat my meals off of the plastic lid of a mixing bowl. My guests have to use the bowl itself, and since that's the only one I own, when soup is on the menu, one of us has to eat out of the saucepan. All the better — less to wash. There's only one chair in my place, so we have to eat on the floor, Indian style. My now-empty moving boxes act as personal dining tables. My bed, if you want to call it that, is a sleeping pad and bag on the floor — but I do have a pillow. This is how I live. No plates, little furniture, few comforts.

I don't have a radio, a stereo or a boom box, but music is essential. So I listen to

the pirated collection off my aging laptop. That's right: pirated. What are the Internet police gonna do? Take away the lid to my plastic bowl? If you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose. When I get sick of the thousands of songs sitting on the hard drive, I stream a radio station off the 'Net — indie, reggae, '80s, '90s, alternative, rock, punk, blues, ska, world beat, whatever. It's all there. A smorgasbord of sound.

I don't own a car. Never intend to. Polluter of skies, paver of earth, instigator of war. I ride a bike. And I get \$115 in food stamps every month. A friend of mine once asked if I felt guilty about it. "No, I'd rather the government spend their money feeding me than bombing the innocent

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by harvey dickson



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