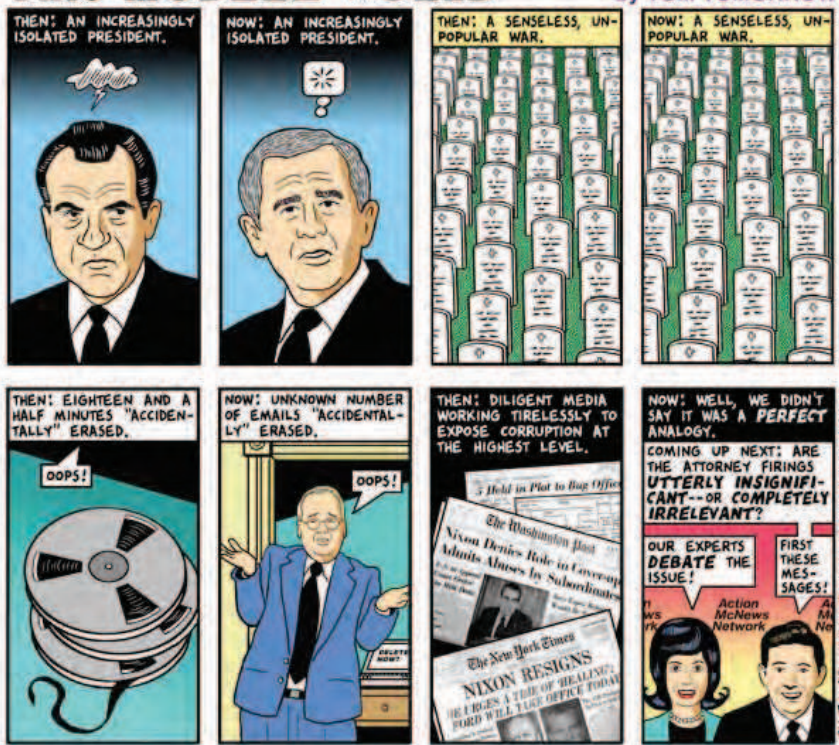


THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

CITY RUSHES DOWNTOWN DECISION

The city of Eugene continues to charge ahead with a recommendation to give \$50 million in subsidies to a Portland developer for a downtown megaproject without significant public input.

As early as April 25, the City Council could decide to endorse the staff recommendation for a KWG development proposal that could involve tearing down almost four blocks of downtown and replacing them mostly with parking garages, high-rent housing and chain stores.

"Are we ready to make this decision in the community and the council?" asked councilor Alan Zelenka at a Monday, April 16 meeting. "I think the answer is a big no."

While the decision could have enormous public cost and community impact, the city has planned no public hearings or public information sessions before the planned vote. City Manager Dennis Taylor said purchase options that city staff crafted for the property to be torn down require that the council vote "no later than" May 14.

The council did hear from a panel of staff selected developers and community members on Monday.

Debate on the council is centering around whether the city should pursue an incremental development approach stressing a diversity of local ownership or a single-owner megaproject that

would generate critical mass with chain stores.

Mayor Kitty Piercy appeared to favor a big project by a single owner. "Something that's big could be incremental" if done in phases, she said at the Monday meeting. Also a big owner could in the future sell off pieces so it "could have individual owners."

The mayor said the city could try to engage the public, but many people in the city don't come downtown. "There's public and there's public."

But Councilor Bonny Bettman said, "We can achieve critical mass by proceeding incrementally" with diverse, local ownership. She questioned how a monopoly single owner could bring the diversity needed for a vital downtown.

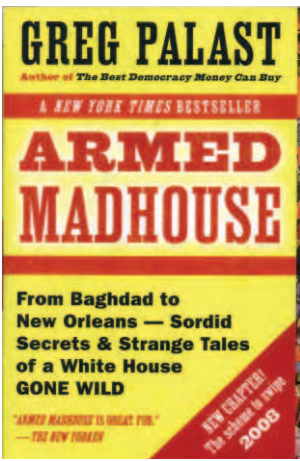
Bettman suggested focusing on bringing people downtown rather than new buildings. "To me it's a critical mass of people downtown, not cars, not parking, not concrete, not asphalt," she said.

City staff are pushing for a quick decision with public input and cost benefit studies after the major decisions on the developer and development approach are made. "That's really putting the cart before the horse," Bettman said. — Alan Pittman

WILL 2008 BE STOLEN TOO?

Oregonians who want a Democrat to win in 2008, Greg Palast says, should "get out of Oregon."

Palast, who extensively documents stolen, miscounted and undercounted votes from the 2004 election in his book *Armed Madhouse*, predicts that the 2008 election will be riddled with similar (or worse) problems. "Oregon's one of the only places in America where you're not going to expect the election to be stolen," he says. Instead, he says, Oregonians committed to democracy should move to



SLANT



We'd like to say the shooting of 33 university students in Blacksburg surprised us. Sadly, it did not. We've seen our own gun slaughter here at Thurston High School. We'd like to say the Thurston shooting changed things in Oregon, so it could never happen again. Sadly, it did not. There are no tough new gun laws and no big increase in continuing funding for mental health treatment or school counselors. The Blacksburg massacre set a new record for wanton gun violence in this nation. We'd like to say that record will never be broken. But sadly ...

Greg Bothun, UO physics professor, gave the Eugene City Club a persuasive lecture last Friday on the virtues of switchgrass as an alternative to gasoline in this country. George Bush even mentions switchgrass, and Jon Stewart makes fun of him for doing so. Bothun says switchgrass has the highest energy density per gram of any of the gasoline alternatives we're looking at. The professor also suggests what individuals can do, short of planting switchgrass in your parking strip, to combat global climate change: 1) Replace all your lightbulbs 2) Weatherstrip 3) Drive 25% less.



It used to be that Oregon was an environmental leader. Thirty-six years ago the state passed the nation's first bottle bill. But that nickel deposit wouldn't pass today. Efforts to up the return to a dime or just expand deposits to water, juice and other containers are foundering in a state legislature awash in grocery and beverage distributor cash. Some of that lobbying cash comes from keeping the millions of nickels that go unredeemed when their cans and bottles litter out of state. Pathetic.



ASTER'S HOLE

The city of Eugene is rushing toward giving \$50 million to a single developer to rip up four blocks of downtown to build mostly condos and a chain store mall. The city's like a bulldozer on rails with this, but how about a compromise? Have Beam do its proposal for a historic renovation of the Center Court and Washburne buildings and a small building in Aster's Hole. Give the block across from the library (including the Sears pit) to KWG for apartments, a movie theater, a corner park and retail. Leave the rest for local diversity. Subsidies for KWG and Beam could be minimized by using the existing mostly empty garages for parking and EmX. If Connor/Woolley won't follow with a project in their former Symantec building, condemn the building and fill the boarded-up ground floor with local businesses and nonprofits displaced by redevelopment.

It's not too early to place your bets. Who will challenge Gordon Smith for his Senate seat in 2008? *The Oregonian's* list of possibles is long: Congressman Peter DeFazio, Earl Blumenauer and David Wu; R-turned-D State Senator Ben Westlund from Bend; Portland progressive Steve Novick; and even former Governor John Kitzhaber, still considered most likely to win a statewide race. We'll bet that our Congressman DeFazio will not run, although it's more tempting with the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee promising to come up with most of the dreaded dollars. Why would Peter foolishly give up his powerful transportation subcommittee chairmanship for a contest he's likely to lose, no matter what the polls might show this week or next? If we win this bet, no need to place another one on candidates to succeed DeFazio, but the chattering class (including us) can't resist. Try Peter Sorenson, Floyd Prozanski, Susan Castillo. What about Kitty Piercy or Jim Torrey or Jack Roberts? Somebody suggested bringing Jim Weaver back. Have fun. Place your bets.