



• **Check out a map** of Eugene and Springfield and look where the new medical centers are going (see push-pins above). If McKenzie-Willamette gets its way, both will be way out on the outskirts, far from the metro population centers. What's the point of having a hospital in Eugene if it's farther from downtown than Springfield? PeaceHealth started this absurd shuffling of health care services by building in north Springfield, and now MPMC has gotten sucked into this illogical rural mindset. MPMC's main justification now is that the doctors will find it convenient, but what about patients and their families, nurses and other hospital workers? Approval of MPMC's new hospital is coming to a head with the city planning staff giving its nod to the Metro Plan amendment, rezoning and other requirements. A public hearing before the Eugene Planning Commission was this week (April 24). The commission will make its recommendations to the City Council, and any council decision is certain to go to the state Land Use Board of Appeals. Unfortunately for us health care consumers, MPMC has several factors working in its favor: Eugene has never turned down any major development, regardless of its negative impact on the community. Rules and regulations that seem clearcut to most of us are subject to interpretation, tweaking and exemptions. Councilors are paranoid about being blamed if Eugene ends up with no major medical center. And Mayor Piercy came out early in favor of the siting, making it difficult for her to change her mind if she becomes the tie-breaker. So it's up to the public to weigh in loudly on these plans, and this series of hearings and meetings is our first real chance. Let our elected officials know that building hospitals out in the sticks is a bad idea when good sites are available in the urban center – sites without the access problems of RiverRidge.

• Speaking of tie-breakers, **back when Torrey was mayor** and carried the swing vote, a lot of forward-thinking issues never came up for a vote. Progressive councilors surveyed their fellow councilors and didn't bother if they couldn't count on a 5-3 vote. Torrey would always favor the conservative view in a 4-4 tie, though Councilor Gary Papé was less predictable. Now Mayor Piercy's in a position to break ties with a more progressive view, and we're pleased to see she's doing it. The wise decision to finally condemn two tracts at the headwaters of Amazon Creek to create a city park would not have happened with Torrey at the gavel. Back in January, Piercy broke a tie to stop a premature and expensive land supply survey that Torrey would have loved. We predict more positive tie-breaking votes are coming. Meanwhile, a conservative and predictable voting bloc of Councilors Clark, Solomon, Poling and Pryor has formed. Clark ran unopposed last November and came into office without needing to air his views on the issues. He told us he was open to new ideas and to expect some surprises in his voting. We're still waiting.

• **What's up with the idea** that Eugene has to expand its urban growth boundary if we create a park where homes could have been built? Seems like just another excuse for sprawling. Eugene and Springfield both have plenty of land for infill and redevelopment within our existing UGB. The pressure to sprawl is not coming from the people of Lane County; it's coming from builders who can make more money by developing cheap land on the outskirts – and passing on to taxpayers the tab for infrastructure. Rep. Terry Beyer wants the Legislature to sever Springfield from Eugene for purposes of land use planning. Just another attempt to make Lane County look more like Orange County.

• **Never thought we'd see the day** when the competing *Oregonian* and *The Register-Guard* would arrive in our box cozily wrapped in the same plastic bag. That's all about saving circulation costs for both the big dailies and, we presume, to keep one more piece of plastic out of the landfill. Big benefits, but if the papers were free, as some say they eventually will have to be, door-to-door driving would fade away, too. Think of that environmental benefit!

• **We often bitch** about superficial "If it bleeds it leads" local broadcast news, but there is some decent reporting out there on the air waves. Congrats to KOPT, KLCC and KTVL for taking top awards at the recent Oregon AP Broadcast Association awards.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

CITY MAY PAY \$35 MILLION

As *EW* went to press Wednesday morning, City Manager Dennis Taylor and his staff were continuing to advocate for a Portland developer's large proposal for downtown involving at least \$35 million in public subsidies and tax breaks without a public hearing or detailed information.

City staff recommended that the City Council vote on Wednesday, April 25, to approve KWG's concept for a million sq. ft. redevelopment. Any public hearings, public involvement and disclosure of project details would only come after the decision.

KWG proposes that the city and taxpayers provide an estimated total of about \$35 million to subsidize its development, according to city and KWG documents. That taxpayer subsidy includes \$16 million for 600 underground parking garage spaces, \$5 million in utility upgrades, \$1 million in offsite costs, \$1.6 million to buy land and a \$1.3 million subsidized loan, according to a staff report.

The \$35 million total subsidy estimate also includes about \$10 million in property tax breaks. City staff did not provide an estimate of the cost of the tax breaks in their report to the council, but KWG said in its proposal that it wants 10 years of tax exemptions for its project. Those tax exemptions could

cover about 80 percent of the \$191 million project. Based on city urban renewal information, a tax break of that size would be worth about \$10 million to KWG.

KWG wrote that the subsidies are needed for it to make a 13 percent profit on the development. City staff describe the subsidy as an "investment," but the proposal does not include any return in the way of profit-sharing for taxpayers.

The KWG development proposal offers taxpayers no certainty that the subsidy numbers would not increase in the future or even that the project will ever be built. KWG describes its project as contingent on letters of intent from key cinema, hotel and grocery store tenants and "market substantiation" of the actual tenant demand for the project.

In choosing KWG, city staff are recommending that the council reject a smaller, incremental development proposal by Beam Development, also of Portland. The Beam proposal asks for \$1.6 million in public subsidies plus possible tax breaks for a mixed-use project about one-tenth the size of KWG.

Beam describes its proposal as a "feasible" historic preservation project that will provide "affordable" space to local and small retailers, businesses and non-profits.

KWG said its project will include "national retailers" and will "seek to upgrade the character" of the area to make it more "upscale." KWG said it will try to accommodate local retailers but, "they will have to be able to afford the new rent."

— Alan Pittman

WHOLE FOODS RETURNING?

Will a new subsidized development plan for downtown include Whole Foods?

The KWG development proposal that city staff are supporting includes a concep-

