

Upside Down

City's needs have priority downtown

When I wanted to build a straw bale house in southern Utah a few years back, I hired an out-of-town architect who had built some conference yurts and energy-efficient homes. I wanted a small (800 sq. ft.) house; he wanted to design a bigger house. I wanted a simple loft; he wanted to design a second story with a cupola.



Finally he suggested I look for another architect. "I don't do low-income houses," he explained. I thought that was pretty funny—and looked for another architect.

"I like small houses," said Moab architect Susie Harrington. "You tell me what you want. I'll give my best advice, but it's your house."

So I have an 850 sq. ft., south-facing, single story straw-bale house, several triple-pane windows, and a great Harrington-signature curved roof. It's warm without any heating on most below-freezing winter days. It's cool most of the 100 degree-plus days of July and August, needing only a couple of swamp cooler hours a day. It was fun working with Harrington and it's our house.

Unfortunately, in the case of West Broadway "urban renewal," Eugene's City Council committed to Portland developer KWG before we, as a community, had decided what we wanted to build. Now supporters of Measure 20-134 ask us to provide an unclear number of tens of millions of dollars in subsidies to an as-yet unspecified KWG development on two downtown blocks. As for what we might want, we're basically left with whatever City Council "recommends" to their already-selected developer and then guaranteeing KWG a 13 percent profit on what KWG decides to build. That's not a good position to be in.

If we defeat Measure 20-134, we can hire a developer who wants to work with what we want and how much we want to spend on two downtown blocks.

For instance, let's think about "the park issue." From the beginning of public (as opposed to city staff) discussions about re-developing the West Broadway area, a sizeable sector of citizens, urban designers, and architects have repeatedly urged the creation of a park across from our fine, public, urban renewal Eugene City Library. Also from the beginning, the city's selected developer Thomas Kemper of KWG has dismissed the idea of incorporating a park into KWG's plan. He has repeatedly said that if we want a park in the area, we'll have to pay for it separately, i.e., in addition to whatever we will pay KWG for its as yet not-revealed plan.

Most of the West Broadway Advisory Committee, uncommonly afraid of scaring off KWG, proposed 15-foot wide sidewalks in front of (and serving) the KWG development's businesses as its primary "open space" option. The WBAC's second proposed "open space option" is to maintain and enhance alleys for pedestrian access as well as service vehicle use. The third is for the city (not KWG) to "consider changes" to the existing sterile and uninviting Broadway Plaza. The last proposal is for "extra deep sidewalks" or a "small corner plaza" across from the library, "less than 1/8 city block."

In the face of growing, vocal public resistance to, among other problems, the lack of assurance of a public-amenity park in this \$40 million Measure 20-134, a City Council majority tepidly changed the near-library plaza proposal from "less than 1/8 city block" to "not less than 1/8 city block." One-eighth of one city block amounts to 6 percent of the two block, publicly subsidized West Broadway development. But remember Tom Kemper's warning: Even this tiny "corner plaza" would cost city money additional to subsidizing what KWG builds.

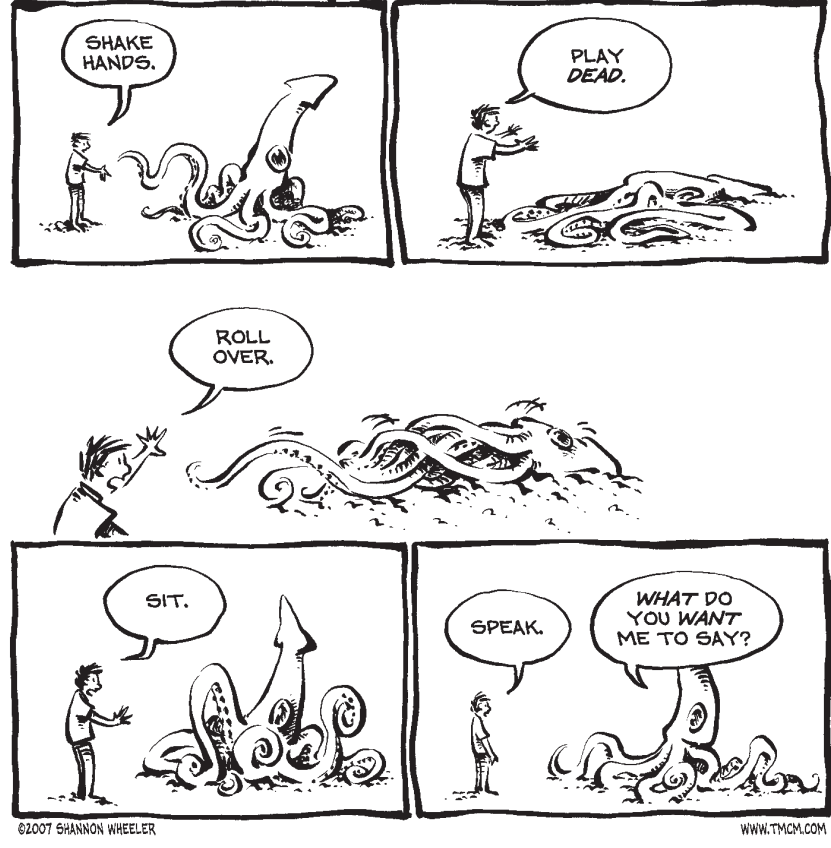
And that's just the park. We're in the same, weak position with regard to whether a big grocery store will be built near Kiva; a mall-size movie theater will be built; and/or another large parking garage. The WEBAC developed a long list of non-prioritized recommendations for the area; the City Council tinkered a little with the recommendations; and off they'll go to KWG. Then KWG will tell us what they want to develop. And then we'll guarantee them a 13 percent profit.

When I realized my out-of-town architect wanted me to build a larger, more expensive, different house than I wanted, we both realized it was time to part ways. I figure it's the same way with KWG.

If we defeat Measure 20-134, we can hire a developer who wants to work with what we want and how much we want to spend on two downtown blocks. We can find our community's equivalent of a Susie Harrington who will say, "I like building with communities. You tell me what you want, and I'll give my best advice, but it's your community."

Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist since 1981. She can be reached at mob@efn.org

How to Be Happy (7 of 8) by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOMETHING SENSIBLE

Eric Stillwell (letters, 10/4) misses the point with the looming downtown calamity before voters, as did the majority of members on the West Broadway Advisory Committee (WBAC).

The additional \$40 million in urban renewal district funds Eugene voters are being asked to approve is just the tip of the iceberg. This shell game is stacking up over \$69 million of public monies to subsidize a private developer's guaranteed 13 percent profit. The lack of fiscal discipline from the majority of WBAC members in making recommendations gives cover for the developer to drive the cost of this boondoggle for taxpayers even higher. Meanwhile, \$87 million would be diverted from schools and other essential government services over the length of this funding scheme.

Yes, we should do something downtown—something sensible. Eugene has the funds and the ability to develop downtown without any increase of the spending limit or extension of the Urban Renewal District ending date. The city has proposals for several projects that would build 106 housing units, with 5,000 sq. ft. of retail space on the Sears pit site; reclaim the historic Centre Court and Washburn Buildings; and redevelop the Aster pit site. That combination of projects can be developed with currently available funds and without amending the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan.

This approach is within our budget, provides downtown housing, protects local merchants, reclaims historic assets and makes good sense. Join me in voting no on 20-134.

Rob Handy
West Broadway Advisory Committee

RE-BUTT-AL

Responding to Sue Kupka (10/11), I do apologize to any and all persons that I inadvertently annoyed with my exuberant dancing at the Oct. 2 Jethro Tull concert. I was simply carried away by thrill of seeing the great, incomparable Ian Anderson, Dave Barre, Duoane Perry, et al from my front-row

center seat. I was simply *unable* just to sit still the entire time. Yes I did make a couple sashays up the aisle, but those only lasted a fraction of the total show time.

Yes the security did let me get away with a little bit more than the average, but I really *did* try not to push them *too* far. Yes, I did do a unique style of dancing in my seat, but I thought my legs in the air were preferable to my whole body blocking more of the view of the people behind me.

I do take exception to one point specifically, your assertion that I was not wearing any underwear: I was wearing a pair of pantyhose, a thong bikini, plus a pair of fishnets over the top. I was also wearing a bra/slip.

Judging from the overwhelming majority of the responses that I heard from various men and women during the intermission and after the show, I was their heroine of the night. No one expressed or vocalized dismay or ire, on the contrary they greeted me with big smiles and high fives. If anyone had complained, I am the type of person that would have listened to them and modified my behavior. So Sue Kupka, I apologize again, but as Oscar Wilde once said, The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about."

P.S. I may be a hoyden, but I am not a "ho"!

Catherine Swanson
Springfield
aka The Lady in Red

THE BIG SIPHON

I agree something needs to happen downtown. Two years ago, the city of Eugene was ready to sign a contract with Thomas Kemper, the K in KWG, to build 106 housing units with retail space in the Sears pit, and with Beam to refurbish the Centre Court and Washburn Buildings. Those projects were affordable without raising the urban renewal district by \$40 million.

If the proponents of Measure 20-134 think this big and expensive approach to redeveloping two blocks downtown is such a great idea, why don't they give it to the voters in