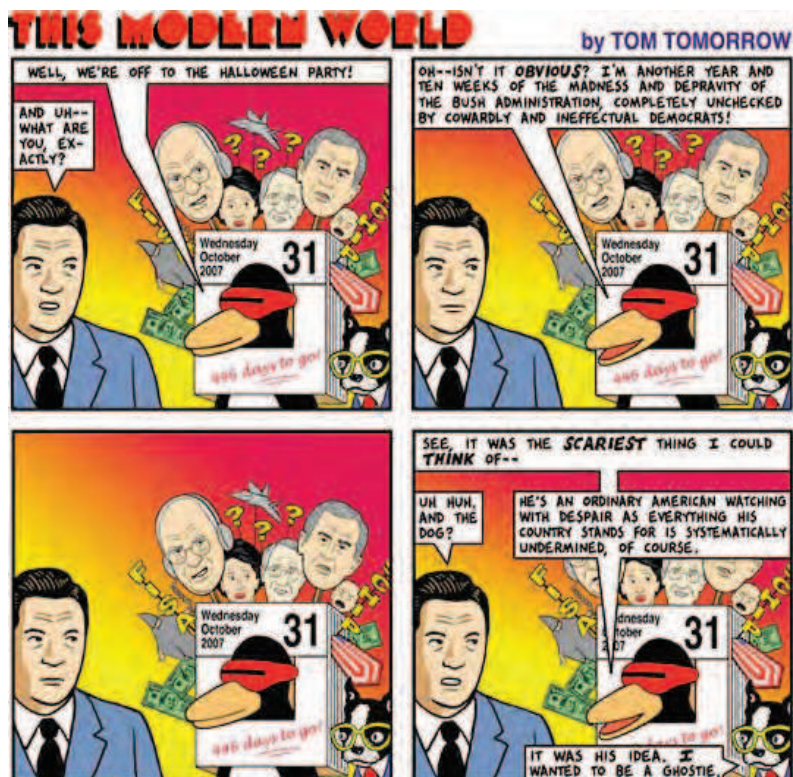




news Briefs

BUILDING MARKET PLUMMETS

While developers and Springfield politicians are fervently arguing that a lack of land means that Eugene should allow more urban sprawl, the local home building market has collapsed, according to permit statistics.

Developers applied for 62 percent fewer building permits so far this year compared to the same period in 2005, according to city of Eugene data. In 2005, developers had applied for 617 residential building permits by Oct. 29. In the same period this year, permit applications had declined almost three-fold to 235, the lowest level in a decade.

Realtors have also reported a sharp drop in home sales. The September supply of unsold homes in Lane County more than tripled from 2.3 months in 2005 to eight months in 2007, the Regional Multiple Listing Service reported.

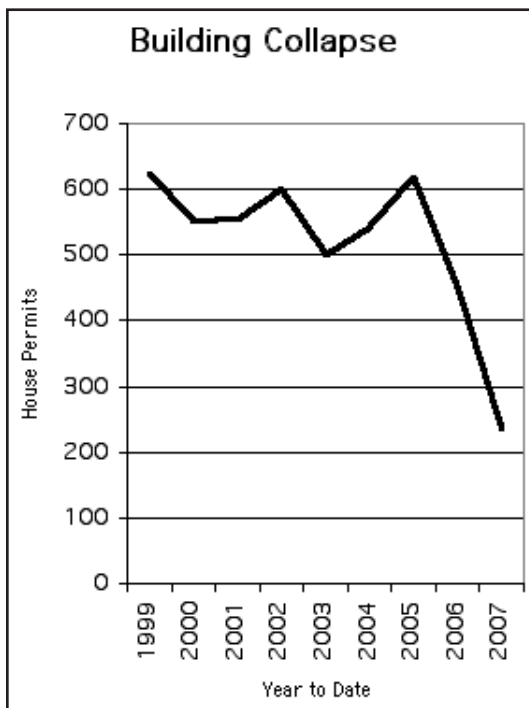
Home building and home sales have declined sharply across the nation in response to the national home mortgage collapse.

But even as local developers cancel projects and try to unload land, pro-sprawl advocates continue to argue that a supposed land shortage requires the city to open

up the urban growth boundary (UGB).

Last week the Eugene City Council balked at rushing to move towards more urban sprawl in response to a bill developers and their Springfield political allies pushed through the Legislature this summer. Sprawl supporters argued the measure requires the city to inventory buildable lands for homebuilders, the first step towards a UGB expansion. But the exact wording of the half-page House Bill 3337 that developers wrote appears vague, requiring the city to "complete the inventory" required "to begin compliance" with the measure "within two years."

The Eugene council voted to discuss the matter further at a later meeting with more information. *The Register-Guard*, itself a major suburban developer with an office park at I-5 and Beltline, complained about the delay in an editorial Oct. 26, blaming Eugene's anti-sprawl stance for the developers' bill and calling on the city to "get on with business." — Alan Pittman



Election Endorsements

• **Not voted yet?** We heard from the Lane County Elections Department that only about 17 percent of the ballots had been turned in by the start of the week. In previous special elections the voting was more like 25 percent by now. Come on, people. Let's plow through those piles of papers on our kitchen tables, find those ballots and mail them by Nov. 1 or drop them off at one of the white ballot boxes around town before 8 pm Tuesday, Nov. 6. A list of drop box locations is at www.co.lane.or.us/Elections/DropOff.htm Still undecided? See our full endorsements in our Oct. 18 issue. Below is our short list:

• **Springfield Measure 20-131: NO.** This measure would slightly increase taxes and divert at least \$43 million from school, city and county tax revenues for "urban renewal" projects in downtown Springfield.

• **Eugene Measure 20-132: YES.** This measure adds a 3 cents a gallon fuel tax to the current 5 cent tax, to be used to repair streets and roads within the city limits.

• **Eugene Measure 20-134: NO.** This measure amends the downtown urban renewal plan to increase spending (public subsidies) by at least \$40 million.

• **State Measure 49: YES.** This measure repairs some of the damage and confusion created by the flawed Measure 37 that allows sprawling housing developments, strip malls, gravel pits and billboards on valuable farm and forestlands.

• **State Measure 50: YES.** This measure adds 84.5 cents per pack to the tobacco taxes currently in effect, with the proceeds going to bolster Oregon's Healthy Kids program.

• Supporters of Eugene's **downtown urban renewal** measure argue that it won't hurt local school revenue because the state equalizes school funding. How can supposed school advocates go to Salem with a straight face to lobby for more state school funding while they're advocating raiding the state school funding account to pay for another parking garage downtown? If everyone had their attitude of stealing from the cookie jar, there would be no money for the state to equalize among schools. Unfortunately, this free money attitude is all too common. With urban renewal and a myriad of other corporate tax break programs, local governments have diverted billions from state school funds. The result is the tax revolt among common people forced to make up for the diverted school money and the absurdly crowded classrooms we have today. It's a similar "tragedy of the commons" with environmental issues. "Oh, the burden of my relatively small amount of pollution will be equalized and borne by all," goes the argument. But when everyone ignores the common good, that eventually destroys the environment, and schools, for everyone.

• Good news that Democrat **Jefferson Smith** is starting up the Oregon political ladder by running for the House District 47 seat. That's east Portland and mid-county, now represented by Jeff Merkley, the Democrat who is running against Gordon Smith for the U. S. Senate. Jefferson Smith is the young lawyer who left a big Portland firm and started the Oregon Bus Project five years ago. He's smart, liberal, effective, funny, hard-working – just what we need to join what he calls "the incredible group in the House Caucus right now – some great people to work with and learn from – and there's a unique opportunity over the next decade to help make Oregon the place it ought to be." His website is jeffersonsmith.com.

• So what do we think about **Mark Weber**, who's being called the "this country's foremost Holocaust denier," and will be speaking at UO Friday? Is he a racist, a bigot, a neo-Nazi, an academic fake? Or is Weber just a historian with a different perspective on world history and U.S. foreign policy? What concerns us here more than the credibility of his writings and speeches are the people who would deny him a podium and a microphone on the UO campus. What better place is there than the UO to express and discuss provocative, even idiotic ideas? And people who figure Weber has nothing constructive to say can stay away or walk out on his lecture. Why Weber was invited by the Pacifica Forum is still puzzling to us. It would only take a few minutes to come up with a list of notable speakers who would have more credibility in advancing our understanding of U.S. foreign policy – even regarding Israel's influence – and would draw a bigger audience than Weber.

• Thanks to all who partied with us Oct. 25 at Indigo District **celebrating our 25th anniversary**. The free party coincided with our big Best of Eugene issue, and it was great fun to wiggle through a friendly crowd of our kind of peeps. Special thanks go to our excellent food providers Cornucopia, Brails, Tasty Thai, Papa's Soul Food Kitchen and Sweet Life; all our advertisers, the Indigo District gang for keeping us well lubricated, Mood Area 52, the Best of Eugene band with Eagle Park Slim, Two Legged Lucy, Gaylee Russell, John Henry's Broadway Revue, *Eugene Weekly's* Divas, the Norma Fraser Band and Yeltsin. Let's do it again in 25 years.

• Check out blogs.eugeneweekly.com for coverage of Tuesday night's Brewhaha debates.

