

# Doing Something

Time for new directions downtown

**T**axpayers for Sensible Downtown Development would like to take this opportunity to thank the 63 percent of voters who supported the effort to keep our downtown locally oriented and utilize public money responsibly. We would also like to extend our appreciation for the hard work of the supporters for the KWG proposal and those who served on the West Broadway Advisory Committee. We respect the passion and sense of purpose they put into their approach. We empathize with their disappointment and want to reassure all involved that we do not intend to rest on our laurels. We all recognize downtown is in need of revitalization and share the goal of making the heart of our town as special and lively as possible.

We optimistically look forward to "doing something" downtown as soon as possible. Fortunately both developers, Beam and Kemper, have maintained publicly that they still wanted to build their original, incremental proposals, if the ballot measure failed. The Beam proposal would reclaim the Centre Court building, including constructing a building on the adjacent Aster pit, and renovate the Washburne building. The Kemper proposal would construct 106 units of housing with 5,000 sq. ft. of neighborhood scale retail on the Sears pit. The Sears pit development has the potential to be reconfigured to accommodate a park across from the library. Both of these proposals can be paid for with funds already on hand. There is plenty of room for flexibility if specifics of these projects need to be adjusted to respond to emerging circumstances. We hope the strength of the election mandate will keep the city's actions in line with what the community is willing to support.

The next logical step would be to convene "charrettes" (independently facilitated public design forums) to determine the community's vision for revitalizing downtown. An important aspect of this process would be to identify community values, such as local economies; small businesses; dense housing; and the look and function of downtown. Given the passionate feelings about downtown, it is sensible to seriously seek out meaningful public participation this way.

Urban renewal money may have benefited the library, but it is atypical for urban renewal money to result in a public project. In either case it is more honest to give voters an up or down choice by offering a bond measure for expensive projects. In the spirit of a truly participatory city government, citizens need to be empowered to decide on large expenditures by voting – especially given the current budget climate, where there is not enough revenue to pay for basic government services. With the involvement of the taxpayers and the ability to scrutinize the costs and benefits of specific proposals, the city can generate democratically driven visions, leading to community supported projects.

In order to help promote accountability and eliminate costly and destructive speculation, it would be prudent to immediately adopt a revised "sunset" date for the Downtown Urban Renewal District (URD). December 2009 is date of the last library payment and the original ending date for the district. Council should amend the plan to reinstate that ending date. It was only in 2004 that the council majority voted to extend the ending date from 2009 out to 2024. If the district remains intact throughout that period, taxes are still being diverted from the impacted jurisdictions and will accumulate in the district account. A portion of that money can still be spent, without voter approval, on a limited list of eligible expenses. The rest of the diverted tax dollars will simply wait in the account for voters to forget this election and a new council majority to approve an increased spending limit. In light of the election mandate, that would be inappropriate.

**O**nce the "promise" of a massive URD subsidy is eliminated, those property owners who have refused to sell or lease their properties can no longer profit from that approach. Waiting for the public pot of gold while properties deteriorate and values decline, won't pay off anymore. That alone will have a positive impact on revitalization. When vacant buildings and properties that have been kept off the market are offered for lease or sale, entrepreneurs will be able to bring new and varied investment into downtown.

The most obvious, forehead-slapping revelation of this election defeat is the degree to which city officials are out of touch with the folks who actually pay the bills. Hopefully, that message will finally resonate with our city's bureaucracy, which has an established track record of embracing public relations instead of accountability and reform. It is time to commit to true reform, starting with creating an incremental and affordable approach to downtown revitalization and ending the URD, including shutting down the URD account. That will be a greatly appreciated and positive gesture towards creating trust with the voting community. There is a lot of work ahead, and we need to work together.

*Contributing to this letter were Gavin McComas, Bonny Bettman, George & Melissa Brown, David Monk, Betty Taylor, Lisa Warnes and Paul Nicholson for Taxpayers for Sensible Downtown Development.*

America to what it was before Teddy Roosevelt was president. Grover Norquist, a Republican strategist, said something to this effect as well as wanting government to be "small enough to drown in a bathtub." Basically, they want to undo the progress of the 20th century.

If you liked the 19th century, you'll love the Republican vision of the future.

We all can get to have our say about this next year. Vote!

*Charles Dalton  
Eugene*

## GET CONGRESS TO LEAD

Rep. Peter DeFazio is attempting to persuade the chairs of the House Armed Forces Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Select Intelligence Committee to hold oversight hearings on the Cheney/Bush plans to attack Iran. We can support this effort by calling his office and offering our agreement. We can also call the offices of the rest of the Oregon congressional delegation and ask them to sign the letter requesting the hearings.

We can call the offices of the committee chairs themselves and request hearings. We can call Sen. Wyden's office and urge him to do the same thing in the Senate. (A copy of the DeFazio/Lee/Kucinich letter requesting hearings can be found in *Democracy Rising, U.S.*, Oct. 15)

We must get Congress to take the lead in framing this issue. If the Cheney/Bush team spins an attack on Iran as necessary to support our troops in Iraq, then it's a done deal. Even a progressive such as Rep. DeFazio might have to vote for it as he has voted to fund the occupation of Iraq.

*Jere C. Rosemeyer  
Eugene*

## TIME TO STAND UP

U.S. Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schulz (D-Fla) voiced baffling imagery in opposing impeachment hearings for Vice President Dick Cheney when she was a guest on Air America Radio, Nov. 9. She claimed impeachment hearings would "block out the sun," diverting time from worthier issues. Has the good congresswoman from the Sunshine State not noticed our country has been in ever-darkening solar eclipse starting on Day One of the Bush-Cheney regime?

She also claimed that impeachment is not a high priority of the American people. The Judiciary Committee, tasked with determining the merits of impeachment hearings, is comprised of dozens of congressfolk, a very long list. I've spoken with virtually dozens of congressfolk's aides who tell me over and over again they are being swamped with calls demanding impeachment ... period.

Patriotic Americans know that we must take a strong stand so that future "leaders," regardless of party, will not usurp their power at the expense of our democracy, our Constitution, our nation's treasure, our soldiers (who are our nation's treasure), our privacy and untold innocents.

Call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 225-3121, ask for Judiciary Chairman John Conyers and request open public hearings for the impeachment of Dick Cheney. Junior to follow.

*Carol Berg-Caldwell  
Eugene*

## IS BIODIESEL BOGUS?

I understand Michael Kelm's viewpoint ("Offsetting the Benefits") regarding the difficulty in being energy efficient in a 4,000 sq. ft. McMansion style home. However, I think he's incorrect on the biodiesel equation. He refers to the "converter" needed for biodiesel. Unless someone is using straight raw veggie oil that isn't transesterified (say that 10 times fast, or just say processed for short), this isn't needed. A diesel car doesn't need any conversion to visit a retail biodiesel station. For cars manufactured prior to 1993, new fuel lines are needed after six to 12 months (\$50 for parts, or around \$200 to have a mechanic install them), since natural rubber fuel lines were used. Nowadays, cars are made with synthetic rubber fuel lines. You may also need to change your fuel filter a couple of times as all the build up left by regular diesel is being cleaned out of the engine.

In Eugene, we are lucky enough to have Sequential Biofuels (with a great new gas station off I-5 that I actually look forward to visiting). Currently, the B-5 blend (a 5 percent biodiesel blend), B-20 and B-99 blends use already processed waste veggie oil from Kettle Chips in Salem. That's right, a waste product not drilled out of the ground, from 70 miles away. That's a pretty good efficiency rating for fuel in my book. Check out [www.sqbiofuels.com](http://www.sqbiofuels.com) for more info. However, I couldn't agree with Kelm more that driving less is the most effective way to reduce your transportation footprint.

*Ali Gartlan  
Eugene*

## UTTERLY TASTELESS

I'm appalled that you're actually printing the column, "Ask a Mexican!" Strangely, last week's issue even had printed in bold letters on the cover "STEREOTYPE FREE!"

I had to re-open the *Weekly* a few times just to make sure I hadn't dreamed the whole thing up!

How can a community that prides itself on its progressive, open attitudes even think of running this utterly tasteless column that does nothing to build others up? Please drop it immediately and apologize to our Latin American neighbors.

And as for those full-page meth ads. If run them you must, I challenge you to include in each issue a full-page image equally beautiful and inspiring.

For the time being, I might just skip directly to the event listings.

*Rachael Wassenaar  
Eugene*

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