

Burmeister, suffers from multiple sclerosis, his sister is a diabetic with no health insurance to pay for insulin, and his brother has been diagnosed schizophrenic. Burmeister turned 24 in prison on Wednesday, July 23. — *Camilla Mortensen*

SUBURBAN DOWNTOWN

The city of Eugene will allow more parking lots downtown in a move that state land-use regulators criticize as violating efforts to reduce driving and permitting “suburban-density in the region’s core.”

The Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) questioned whether the drop in density requirements is consistent with state regulations requiring efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The VMT regulations are the state’s chief means of reducing urban sprawl and fighting global warming caused by car pollution.

The City Council voted July 14 to reduce required density in a large part of downtown by about a third. The old regulations would require a one-story building to fill its site. But the DLCD wrote that the new density reductions “would appear to allow a one-story building with parking underneath to cover less than one-third (32.5 percent) of its site.”

The council voted 6-2 for the density reduction with Councilors Bonny Bettman and Betty Taylor opposed. The reduction does not apply to a central, 18-block area downtown where higher density requirements remain in place.

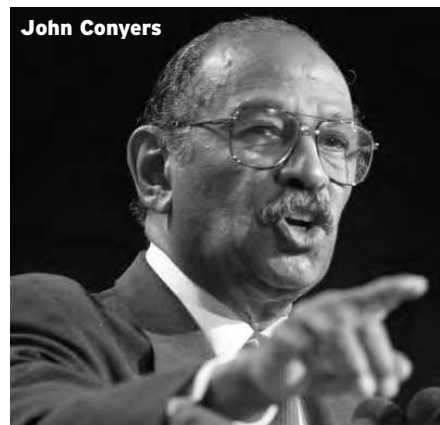
Bettman said the city was now moving in the “opposite direction” from long-standing efforts to promote downtown density to reduce sprawl and driving. “I don’t think we should reduce density this extremely in the urban core.”

But other councilors and city staff argued that developer Hugh Prichard and others had said that the regulations had blocked projects in the downtown area. “The whole downtown has been rapidly

deteriorating since we implemented the code,” said Councilor Jennifer Solomon.

But many projects have been built downtown in compliance with the density requirements including the Heron Building near Down to Earth, the new library and the new office building and apartment building at the old *Register-Guard* site. The city has also permitted two drive-through coffee kiosks under the code.

The council also voted to create a loophole by allowing unrestricted parking for a project on an adjacent lot. But the council did vote against a proposal to limit project surface parking downtown to 20 spaces. “The issue really is do we want to build our downtown for vehicles or do we want to build our downtown for people,” Bettman said. — *Alan Pittman*



LETTER SENT TO CONYERS

A letter with more than 100 signatures of local residents and community leaders was faxed to Congressman John Conyers July 14, calling for a congressional investigation into federal involvement in the controversial community political demonstration in Eugene May 30.

Conyers is chair of the House Judiciary Committee and the letter was also addressed to the committee and the Constitution Subcommittee. Other letters from other local groups and individuals may follow this week.

Happening people

BY PAUL NEEVEL

GEOFF HUGHES & TOM DICKASON

A nationally ranked runner as a high school kid in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Geoff Hughes got back into running in his late 20s when he moved to Eugene with his wife, Therese, and a newly minted degree in sculpture from the SF Art Institute.

Hughes sold sand-cast candles in the early days of the Saturday Market and worked in construction until the early-'80s timber bust, when he started his current 24-year career as a financial planner with Wachovia Securities. He chaired the Oregon Track Club's recently completed eight-year campaign to renovate the Prefontaine Jogging Trail, in partnership with Eugene Parks and Open Spaces. “I competed in the first race on Pre’s Trail in 1975,” he says. “It’s more well-known to runners around the world than it is locally.” In the photo, Hughes competes a Saturday-morning tour of the 4.2 mile trail along with running partner Tom Dickason, another member of the restoration committee. Check out Hughes’ newest metal sculpture, a memorial bench for counselor and fellow Pennsylvania native Neila Campbell, near the gazebo in the Owens Rose Garden.



• We toured **PeaceHealth’s new campus** at RiverBend in north Springfield over the weekend and were impressed with the spacious, well-designed patient rooms, operating rooms, artwork and advanced technology. It’s a huge campus and you can get a good workout just walking from one end to the next. Construction and landscaping are continuing and dirty windows mar the views of the McKenzie River from the upper floors, but in terms of sheer size of buildings and grounds it’s a remarkable project.

The R-G and local broadcast media are heaping accolades on the new medical center and its ski lodge-like lobby, and we’re left with the task of providing balance to editorials that read like hospital press releases. Come on, people, it’s an impressive facility and many of us will likely end up there gasping and wheezing for life, but let’s keep it in perspective. The siting is forcing Springfield’s McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center to relocate to Eugene, a very expensive unintended consequence. And half a billion dollars could have built an architecturally stunning high-rise medical center in downtown Eugene near the central Lane Transit District (LTD) bus station. An urban hospital would have been more compact and energy efficient and require less driving and parking. The upper levels of a downtown hospital would offer panoramas of the Coast Range to the west and the Willamette River to the east, city lights at night and the warm glow of field burning in the distance to the north.

With all the talk about the “healing environment,” let’s not forget why people end up in hospitals instead of doctors’ offices or outpatient clinics: It’s mostly about emergency intervention and critical care. The healing comes later at home. But interfering in that healing will be the stress of high medical bills, the leading cause of bankruptcy. The median cost of a heart attack these days is \$20,000, due in part to high hospital costs. PeaceHealth’s palace, along with the renovation of the Hilyard facilities and McKenzie-Willamette’s forced relation, will place an economic burden on local health care consumers for decades to come.

Are there lessons here for McKenzie-Willamette as it looks at a new location for its hospital? PeaceHealth missed a golden opportunity by abandoning Eugene’s population center to build an inconvenient sprawling edifice on the outskirts. We think Eugene would welcome a more modest and compact, community-centered hospital downtown.

• What’s in the future for the **West Eugene** transportation corridor? The West Eugene Collaborative is wrapping up public meetings in anticipation of making recommendations to local government agencies. And another related and somewhat coordinated process is the planning by LTD for the third phase of bus rapid transit, aka EmX. Phase I was the Eugene-Springfield route; Phase II, already designed, will be a loop including downtown Springfield, RiverBend and Gateway. Phase III will run from downtown Eugene to points west, as far out as Beltline or Greenhill. Considered routes are along West 11th and 13th, or 6th and 7th.

It’s called the West Eugene EmX Extension (WEEE) project and we predict the routing and construction of the western bus lanes will be more complex and controversial than Phases I & II. At issue will be access to businesses, driveways, street parking, bicycle crossings, tree removal, property acquisition, etc., in an area with a long history of haphazard development. Rumors are already flying that the bus lanes could replace the popular concrete bike paths west of City View along Amazon Creek near West 11th, but that seems unlikely due to potential public outcry. Federal funding for the project requires a high benefit-to-cost ratio and minimal environmental damage. Amazon Creek riparian restoration projects, for example, should not be compromised by the construction of new bus lanes.

Public meetings and open houses are under way and will continue at 6 pm Monday, July 28 at the Elks Lodge, 2470 W. 11th, and again Aug. 18 and 20, and Oct. 20. These are opportunities to get educated and provide feedback. Find the schedule at www.ltd.org under “upcoming events.”

• What would a **quarter-block city park** cost the city? Last week in this column we wrote about the lack of a public space in the leading proposals for the half-block of city land across from the Eugene Public Library, and we included a design by Thomas Lincoln. We’ve since heard from Lincoln that he calculates the total cost of his proposed project would be about \$1.6 million, including an “interactive” water fountain. The city already owns the land. And if a play station for kids were added, the designer says the cost would still be under \$2 million. This could be a back-up plan if the developers drop out, or such a park could be located elsewhere downtown, ideally in the city center, or as part of a string of parks connecting Eugene’s park blocks to the river. Such a relatively small investment by the city could pay off long-term in stimulating nearby residential and commercial redevelopment. For example, the apartments and businesses surrounding New York’s Central Park are some of the most desirable properties in the nation.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com