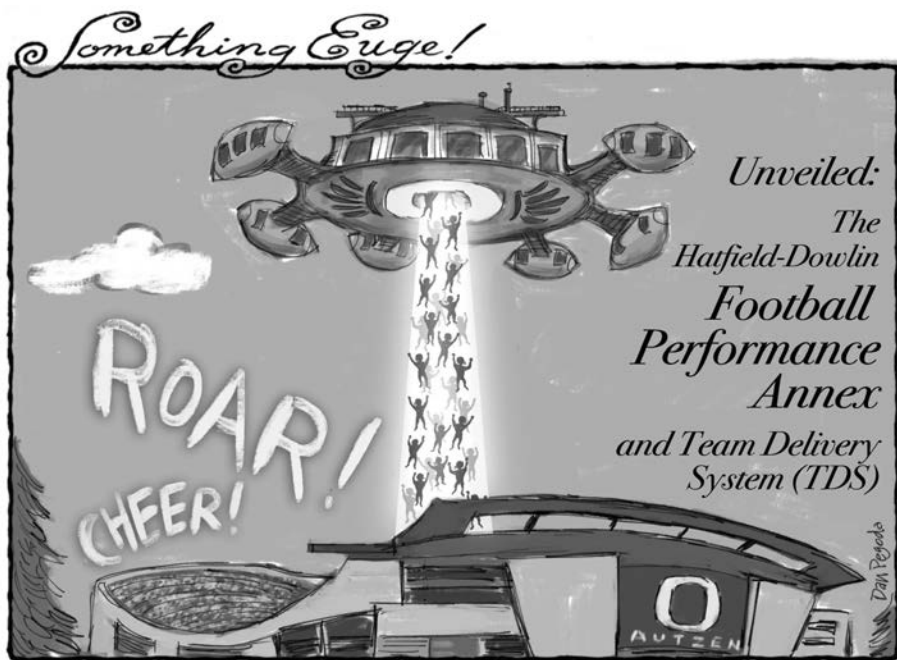




CITY MANAGER CRITICIZED FOR BUDGET PROBLEMS

Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz won some high marks during his annual performance evaluation, but councilors also complained about the budget process that created a nearly \$6 million deficit and poor relations with the public employee union. “A certain pattern has developed here, certain unhealthy trends,” says City Councilor George Brown. Brown says he hasn’t received answers to critical budget-related questions that he submitted in April. “Why it doesn’t bother the other councilors is beyond me,” he says. “In a business environment, there’s absolutely no way that would be tolerated. It would be deemed totally unacceptable.”

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— GEORGE BROWN, CITY COUNCILOR

Brown rated Ruiz unsuccessful, listing problems with Envision Eugene, uncompetitive surplus property sales, the withholding of budget-related information and poor scheduling of work sessions as areas that he believes to need improvement.

The basic budget information included in city documents as required by the state isn’t adequate, Brown says. Some of the budget-related questions he submitted in April remain unanswered, including how many vacant positions are in the budget, he says, so making informed judgments isn’t achievable. “If you don’t get answers to these and then you have four budget committee meetings to deliberate, and at least a third of that

time is taken up by staff presentations, it’s impossible,” he says.

Councilor Betty Taylor criticized the evaluation system, saying that the community evaluators were good people but didn’t really represent Eugene. “I didn’t see any liberals or environmentalists on the list, and I felt it was not a good selection from the community,” she says.

Taylor agrees that councilors don’t have enough information regarding the budget. She says that the city manager has too many other duties to scrutinize the budget for efficiencies and the city needs an independent performance auditor. “I think we should put that on the ballot and ask the people if they want it,” she says.

Ruiz, whose salary has increased \$20,411 to his current pay of \$182,561 in the five years he’s worked for the city, declined his evaluation-based, contractual merit pay raise of \$6,390 in light of the city’s budget troubles. Ruiz’s deferred compensation — money he will receive at a later date — increased to \$17,000. Salem’s city manager, who was also hired in 2008, earns \$159,578 per year.

Other criticisms from council included poor relations with public employee union AF-SCME, the need to improve Eugeneans’ relationship with EPD and the need to foster more involvement with west Eugene and Bethel leaders.

Evaluation comments praised Ruiz for better working relationships with city staff and his responsiveness to Eugene City Council goals and directions. Councilors also noted that goals such as the revitalization of downtown and West Eugene EmX have advanced under Ruiz’s tenure.

Pryor, who rated Ruiz excellent, as did five other councilors, says that Ruiz often takes the blame for simply following the City Council’s direction. “He got a lot of the blame for the election that we just held about the fee,” Pryor says, but Ruiz’s first two recommendations to raise the stormwater fee and have a serial levy to cover the deficit were rejected by the council. “Ultimately the responsibility for the budget of the city of Eugene rests with the City Council because they are the only body that votes to approve budgets,” Pryor says. — Shannon Finnell

SLANT

• About the **UO’s new football temple**: To quote a young woman who worked with the serving crew for the celebratory dinners opening, “It’s disgusting.” We have neither space nor time to properly expand on her observation, but here are a couple of important questions for our public university:

Why is UO campus planning completely shut out of planning athletic facilities? We’re told that Stanford graciously accepts Phil Knight’s gifts, but does not let him put moats around their buildings unless they approve. Why are important details so secret? Isn’t this still a public institution? All observers snicker at the “about \$68 million” figure put out for the cost of the new palace. Some say it cost at least double that, or even \$100 million more. And who knows the long-term costs of staffing and maintaining this facility?

Is this excess really good for student athletes? Do we care as long as the buildings are bait for recruitment? Is this excess good for non-athlete students who do not experience this opulence in their classrooms? Do we care as long as they keep coming for ever-increasing numbers, no matter what the reason? Does local reaction really matter to the UO? Obviously not. Even *The Register-Guard* writers, always loyal to Duck sports, were shut out of the first press conference and tour. *The New York Times* and *Sports Illustrated* had exclusive opening shots. That may prove to be a mistake. The UO football program locally runs on hype, not cynicism.

• “Ding, dong, the witch is dead” — that’s what we hear employees are singing behind the scenes at Lane County. Lane County Commissioners voted unanimously to fire now-former county **administrator Liane Richardson** Aug. 6 after an investigation into her latest scandal — this time over increasing her take-home pay without authorization. But Richardson and her host of issues, from messing with the homeless and activists to costing taxpayers for unfounded investigations, were a symptom of issues at the county, not necessarily the cause. The problems go way back — remember when they hired her without a public search? And the problems are still there. No one knows which commissioner supposedly told Richardson she could possibly make the pay changes; no one knows who else [beyond the whistleblower] knew she was making them. There needs to be a deeper investigation to root out the bad seeds and help us to trust county government again. And what about those threats Richardson was making about taking a private job as an attorney back when she was angling for a \$20,000 raise? If those job offers were indeed real back in January, we doubt she’s getting them now or that she will get any if an ethics complaint is made to the Oregon State Bar.



• The ever-expanding and evolving **Whiteaker Block Party** stirred up a lot of fun over the weekend, but one little snapshot taken during the event and posted on *EW*’s Facebook page incited quite the uproar. The picture in question of a sign on Monroe Street that reads “Boycott Ninkasi. Take Back the Whit! Gentrify This,” elicited a heated debate about Ninkasi’s role in the Whit, the Whit’s storied history with drugs and whether, in fact, the neighborhood is undergoing gentrification. Comments ranged from “The Whit is gonna turn into the Pearl District!” to “I don’t even drink beer and this makes me want to support Ninkasi. Neighborhoods evolve. The Whit is prime real estate as far as the layout of the city goes,” and of course the token hippie zinger: “Screw you Whiteaker, take a bath.” *EW* supports local job creators and *thoughtful* expansion, but how that can occur while preserving the Whit’s spirit remains a question mark.

• Gov. John Kitzhaber is wrangling for a **special session of the Legislature** to deal with generating new tax revenues and putting the breaks on state pensions. Our economy is improving on many fronts, but not quickly enough to dig our way out of a high jobless rate, continued foreclosure threats and underfunded schools and social services. We’re hearing new talk of a sales tax, maybe one dedicated exclusively to education, but no sales tax proposal has ever come anywhere close to passing in Oregon. Our state certainly has tax inequities that need to be addressed, such as our absurdly low taxes on private timberlands, but each tax break, each tax exemption, has its own powerful lobby in Salem. Oregon’s financial problems mirror the national debate over priorities, but we have an advantage over Congress in that our Legislature is actually capable of meaningful action. Kitzhaber’s banking on that.

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