

hours and decibels in Eugene. Oddly, it is advocated that train whistles not be sounded at night. This point has been made in communities across the nation for years.

I personally believe that the timbre of railroad horns/whistles provide healing resonance to imbalances in our bodies, including in bone marrow, something long understood, at least subconsciously. It was once understood that the sound of train whistles at night worked as sleep aids for the community, an unintended benefit of the rail industry. Whistles and horns help persons drift off to sleep at night.

I have resided in Eugene for two-and-a-half years. When I move to a new area, I try to locate near an airport and/or an active railroad system. I consider each an enhancing environment visually and audibly. To eliminate rail sounds,

especially at night, is to remove health-providing properties.

When I located in Eugene, I heard an employee of the Eugene police force, who picked up on my perspective, indicate he intended to “go over there and talk to them” about railroad whistles still being heard from the Northwest Highway area in late afternoon because “they were supposed to have turned those off.” I don’t think that was accurate in 2014; the whistles were reduced but not eliminated, thank goodness.

I do think that the benefits of railroad horns and whistles should be a factor in considering their use within city limits and especially at the time of night when most people go to bed, even if some newer residents in the area choose, or are directed, to locate near railroad byways

who then complain of rail sounds long accommodated by long-standing residents. The greater good must be weighted.

Sharon Pearce
Eugene

SOLAR BUDGET

The reason we use fossil fuels is they are more concentrated and easier to use than the alternatives. It would be nice to have simple replacements for this stored energy, but our growth-based economy requires ever-increasing use of resources.

Now that the “low hanging fruit” of easy-to-extract fossil fuels are in decline, replaced by difficult-to-extract energy such as offshore drilling, tar sands, fracked oil and gas, our economy is having increased difficulty sustaining continued growth. This is a deeper problem than the politics

of oil company executives or corporate bribery of politicians.

Economic impacts of energy decline are leading to increased instability, with social chaos that can be as challenging as the ecological damage.

Financial hardships lead to demagogues — the classic example is 1930s Germany. Trump is indicative of the blaming likely to happen on the energy downslope.

Energy literacy about energy decline could be a partial antidote for scapegoating, but would require admitting we have reached the limits to growth on an abundant, round, finite planet.

Using solar panels for a quarter century taught me living on our solar budget will power a much smaller, steady state economy no longer based on exponential growth.

VIEWPOINT BY KARL EYSENBACH

The City Council Bubble

DYSFUNCTION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Sometimes extremely revealing insights pop up in places where you least expect them. Such was the case of a recent Fairmount Neighborhood Association meeting. City Councilor Alan Zelenka gave a report on a variety of current topics facing the Eugene City Council, and in the process revealed some very dark and disturbing insights into the dysfunctions in our local government, particularly regarding the controversy surrounding the newly revealed information that there were \$7 million of previously unaccounted-for overruns in the construction of the new Eugene City Hall.

I asked, “How do you respond to some people saying that the city mismanaged \$7 million of taxpayer money on the City Hall project, and that this has broken the trust of the citizens of Eugene in their local government?”

Zelenka, of course, denied that either of these things had taken place. But then he basically admitted that costs spiraled because the City Hall project was similar to the unanticipated costs that one would incur if one were doing a home remodeling.

If this is his true attitude, then it reveals way too much about what is wrong with city government under the Zelenka-Piercy administration.

Planning for a City Hall paid for by the taxpayers is not analogous to extra add-ons by homeowners in a remodeling and/or new home building project. Apparently costs and proposals for City Hall had not been thoroughly vetted by city staff and the council before information on these costs was provided to the general public in the push to demolish the existing City Hall.

According to Zelenka, repeated questions from and request for changes by City Council played a part in driving up the cost after the initial information was provided to the public.

Unfortunately for Eugene taxpayers, what would appear to be repeated requests for redesign by the City Council definitely violates any principle of prudent management of taxpayer dollars and city resources.

And, unfortunately, the bill for these increased costs was never presented to council by the city manager in a timely fashion.

As a former city administrator myself, I know that definite procedures need to be followed when undertaking a capital construction. In the case of a new city hall, the first thing that a city council and its management should do is to take careful note of the way in which current space is being used, the condition that it is in and the costs of maintaining the current structure. If it is in fact determined that a city hall is needed, then the council should undertake a public planning process, informing the public of its needs for new space, and hold public hearings on planning proposals.

At such a time as there is general consensus that a new city hall is needed, the city council can then go about retaining the services of an architect, or better yet propose a competition between architects to insure that the best design is built for the community.

More importantly, a specific dollar amount has to be allocated and the local government has to have a timeline and strict accounting of public monies for the project. Most importantly, the city should continue to live in the existing building until such time as it can move into the new one.

Zelenka said the earthquake standards for the new building were downgraded because of the cost overruns, yet he said one of the reasons for supposedly getting rid of the old building that had international design awards was that it was seismically unsound.

Zelenka dug himself further into a hole by defending the city’s five-year effort to push for multi-story buildings along South Willamette Street. Zelenka defended city efforts, but he did not have on hand the number of taxpayer dollars that were futilely spent in top down governance that ignored citizen input.

He reported that progress on city acquisition of the EWEB property along the Willamette Riverfront had been delayed due to liability questions regarding industrial waste in the form of PCBs from leaky electrical transformers in the area for 80 years. It was

obvious that this would lead to extended negotiations between the city EWEB, and that the City Council was intent on breaking ground for the new City Hall in June.

One might be led to believe from the recent article in *The Register-Guard* that City Manager Jon Ruiz was the villain in wasting taxpayer dollars, when he finally was forced to reveal the \$7 million cost overrun by saying that there was “no particular reason” for him to bring up the overruns until being forced to do so by City Councilor George Brown.

But one must ask oneself if it is possible that Ruiz’s supposed cavalier remark was given in response to a Eugene City Council that is so wrapped up in the minutia of details that it totally neglects overarching principles of prudent management of taxpayer dollars and the careful following of contracting and construction procedures.

Brown’s line item budget of original cost estimates show line item increases of 100 percent to 70 percent for the most recent construction expenses. Is it unfair for the council to inquire what brought on these massive increases in things like seismic safety or soil studies when a project is supposedly going to be implemented according to some plan?

But it is possible that City Manager John Ruiz’s seemingly cavalier remark on cost overruns may have been generated by his resignation to the fact that his bosses have no idea on how to run a city government, and that he was only doing what he was told to do. If Zelenka’s remarks are emblematic of the feelings of the majority of the council, then the Eugene City Council has a serious problem in sticking to any overriding principles of citizen accountability or prudent financial management.

It might also appear that city councilors exist in some kind of bubble that promotes harmony and unanimity on the council without any reference the actual wishes of their constituents.

Karl Eysenbach of Eugene is a retired teacher, homeless advocate, former city administrator and presidential campaign worker.