

CAPSTONE 2.0?

Regarding the removal of trees and the new apartment building on Orchard and East 15th Avenue, 12 mature trees were removed. Will this be another Capstone project, which is widely regarded to have been a debacle with minimal plantings and inadequate setbacks from the street? Is anyone from the city monitoring this?

George Evans
Eugene

LOVE NOT WRATH

Regarding Lon Miller's letter, "God's Wrath," of June 30, 2016: Lon Miller, with your medieval Biblical thinking, beware you throw stones. You may go down the "Drain." We have been married for 27 years and have yet to become "perverts and deviants." It is your deviant thinking that causes hatred and "stone-throwing" in this world. Someone must have torn the pages out of your Bible where Jesus speaks of love and compassion.

Joanne James
Eugene

EXPLAIN TRAGEDY

Recently, our neighbor in Drain, Lon Miller, "took up" his Bible and found

satisfactory evidence to purport that Orlando's mass murder is, in fact, no other than the modern day equivalent of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Perhaps Lon can thumb his Bible a bit longer and proffer a verse or two that explains his God's wrath in regard to another Miller Family: a Christian family of six who recently were all but exterminated in a horrific train accident in rural Colorado. An extremely tragic event that claimed the lives of the mother, father as well as three young daughters on their way to church. One daughter, 4 years old, was the sole survivor.

Robin Kelly
Eugene

DOG BOOK

This is in response to what I would call a hate mail letter to pit bulls.

Anyone interested in pit bulls, bulldogs, dogs and the human-animal relationship would be smart to read a book called *Bandit: Dossier of a Dangerous Dog*. The author, Vicky Hearne (now deceased), was a nationally known dog and horse trainer, but a poet and philosopher as well who taught for a time at Yale. To quote from the cover, this book is a "dramatic report

from the front lines of the 'pit bull wars,' is a penetrating inquiry into the appropriate relations between animals and the human world, a song of praise for the 'dance of friendship' between animals and people, and a hell of a dog story."

"Hearne brings a poet's keen eye, a philosopher's supple mind and a trainer's true knowledge of dogs to the issues surrounding Bandit's case and her three-year battle to snatch him from the jaws of the judicial system. Witty, fiercely intelligent, eloquent, *Bandit* is essential reading for anyone who cares about animal happiness and human justice."

The library has this book.

One thing — because Hearne is a philosopher, there are occasional rambles into that territory. Just persevere. It is worth it.

Anne Hollander
Eugene

CORPORATE LOGGING

The BLM is working hard to increase logging on our federal public forests in western Oregon by 37 percent. This is exactly the opposite direction we should be going in light of global warming, mass species extinction and the need to protect our quality drinking water. Why would they

be doing this, you ask? They are pressured by the legislators who are given large amounts of money via campaign donations by the logging industry and are using the archaic O&C Act of 1937 as the reason.

We should be having an "all hands on deck" attitude to save our public forests here, as they are one of the best in the world for carbon sequestration and important habitat for wildlife. Our forests are a key component to mitigating the global warming crisis. It is no exaggeration to state that all life on Earth depends on us to give our energy and focus to save our forests and oceans, transition off of fossil fuels, localize food systems and build resilient and truly sustainable communities.

Pam Driscoll
Dexter

SELF GOVERNMENT

No doubt, there is something stirring among the citizenry of this country. People are starting to react to the malaise of alienation, insignificance and hopelessness that the consumer, corporate-owned culture has used to colonize our minds.

Example one: Although blasted by the media as a movement that couldn't articulate its goals, the occupy movement

VIEWPOINT BY PAUL NICHOLSON

Accountability Is the Real Problem

Here we go again — up to 30 more years of urban renewal, because "the city concludes that the entire urban renewal area is blighted." After 48 years and approximately \$130 million (surely over a quarter of a billion dollars adjusted for inflation), the total taxable valuation of all of the property in the district is not even equal to the inflation-adjusted tax money we have poured into it.

Urban renewal's failure, however, is not the cause of the ineffectiveness of Eugene's city government, nor is it the only or the most important betrayal of the public interest.

To understand Eugene politics, one must contemplate just how upside-down city governance has become. In theory, elected councilors bring the priorities of the community to the table and the manager administers council's direction.

In Eugene, the city manager does the politics, and council appears unconcerned about public support for the manager's agenda. This state of affairs is not so much the fault of our elected officials as it is the inevitable result of a charter that endows the manager with way too much power.

When I was elected to Eugene City Council in the early 1990s, then Councilor Shawn Boles warned me that councilors were like mushrooms "kept in the dark and fed manure." Council's real influence on Eugene's civic affairs is so minimal that most council seats are uncontested. City councilors are not even

given an office!

I want to highlight the negative results of the power imbalance in our peculiar version of the city manager form of government. In short, our city government is by its nature unaccountable, wasteful and indifferent to the priorities of the citizens.

Here are two examples of projects that are despised by the public, yet sanctioned by our docile council despite public outrage. You can see that the Urban Renewal scam is chump change compared to the cost of these unloved projects.

Police palace Despite two citizen advisory exercises which urged that police headquarters remain downtown near City Hall, City Manager Ruiz inexplicably purchased a forlorn white elephant, for Eugene's "new" police headquarters — total budget \$35 million for the building and its remodeling. The new police facility is several times the size of the old digs.

City Hall fiasco The City Council commissioned a study of the cost of refurbishing our existing, award-winning mid-century modern City Hall. The highest estimate to refurbish our iconic City Hall was \$12 million. The manager and his minions attacked the work of their own consultant and pressured council to approved a new \$15 million City Hall. The price tag has already risen to \$25 million and still climbing. Once again, citizen input overwhelmingly supported refurbishing the existing historic City Hall.

And then there is a second strategy for avoiding

any meaningful public discussion of our revenue priorities — indirect subsidies of private projects. Consider these two examples:

MUPTÉ project Student housing projects such as Capstone (13th and Olive) not only received 10-year tax exemptions, but also received all sorts of other indirect benefits from the city. For example, Capstone was permitted to start construction without permits and to ignore design standards that would be imposed on local developers. So far, we have forgone about \$2,110,000 in taxes.

Of course, as time passes, and more MUPTÉ projects are built, this number will balloon. Who will ever build an apartment complex on his own dime now that Ruiz set this awful precedent?

Sweetheart deals For example, during Jon Ruiz's first three years at the helm in Eugene, the city's rent expense increased from \$665,631 to \$1,431,442, an increase of more than \$775,000 annually. City offices were moved out of their existing market rate office space into the new urban renewal subsidized office space, not only massively increasing the city's rent bill, but even paying the developers for all unrented space.

These examples are truly the tip of the iceberg.

Ending the urban renewal slush fund would be a good start, but would not, by itself, fix Eugene's broken politics. Council should have kept its word and closed the Downtown Urban Renewal District. But still more importantly, our council and mayor should be required to refer to the voters any action that subsidizes private development or funds a major capital improvement. Your property taxes should fund basic city services unless you, the folks who pay the bills, give the city bureaucracy permission to use your money for some other purpose.

Paul Nicholson is a former Eugene city councilor, and the founder of Paul's Bicycle Way of Life.