

PARKS AND WRECK

Thanks for your article on parks, but there is much more to this story. The history of Scobert Park in the heart of the Whiteaker illustrates a severe disconnect at the city.

Scobert Park is tainted by bad juju, and is a perfect case study of mismanagement and long-term malfeasance by the city of Eugene.

The city forcibly took this property from Dale Scobert in 1979. He received one-quarter of the land's value because in the two years prior to the city taking the land for the park, the city down-zoned it from R-3 to R-1, thereby reducing it to one quarter of its value. The court documents show a heated argument that went on for years.

In the words of Jack Billings, Scobert's attorney, "... the city has now tried unsuccessfully for the third time to take the Defendants' property. Clouding title to their property for over two years should be sufficient harassment and incompetence to warrant a non-suit with prejudice."

Although Scobert and his lawyer petitioned the court several times and succeeded in halting condemnation proceedings, the city took the property by emergency ordinance #18443 on July 23, 1979.

Unable to win in court, the city took

the extraordinary measure of changing city code to justify the condemnation of the property in order to take it. Rather than develop this park itself, the parks department turned it over to neighborhood landscapers who created a gorgeous pocket park. Scobert quickly became a crime magnet and a hangout for transients attracted to Eugene by the Mission, which is a 400-bed facility three blocks away that actually feeds up to 700 per day.

Three hundred extra people wandering around Whiteaker, some of them stomping Scobert Park, caused Public Works to scrape the ground in the fenced-off portion of the park last month because of the intense pressure of homeless transients there. The park is now destroyed.

This is a picture of a manufactured social disaster for the Whiteaker, and should be evidence enough that locating every sanctioned and unsanctioned homeless encampment and social service either in or on the periphery of the Whiteaker is clearly abusive and may ultimately result in a federal lawsuit. That wouldn't be a good use of public money, but since the city is in the habit of throwing money at those who bitch about being treated unfairly, how is this different?

Den Ramsey
Eugene

TRANSIT PLANNING

I don't know much about MUPTEs, but there were a couple of ideas in Bonnie Bettman McCormack's opinion piece that caught my attention.

She said that if Eugene is serious about the transit corridors, we should look at expanded density along West 11th. My observation is that between 11th and 18th, there is an extraordinary number of apartment complexes from City View westward ... now extending to Bertleson with new projects..

If she is right that LTD's EMX extension on West 11th is part of a big plan to keep all apartment dwellers (read: working class and low income) away from South Eugene, that explains a lot. Robert Moses was a leader in using public transportation and infrastructure to keep African Americans away from the lovely amenities enjoyed by the white communities surrounding NYC. To follow this lead even further, may I suggest that you continue to make Willamette Street impractical for expanded bus service?

I prefer a town that has a mix of densities and demographics throughout. Planning can help accomplish that. Some planning letters I do know — NIMBY, rarely help accomplish that.

Hilary Anthony
Eugene

IMPROVE LCC

Remember when Lane Community College was one of the best community colleges in the country, offering an impressive menu of courses and programs to meet students' needs and desires?

In case you've wondered lately, it's no longer that way. Full programs have been cut and remaining programs and departments are skeletal. For example, the English Department has just cut British Literature, World Literature, Chicano/a Lit, Native American Lit and others.

Once, not too long ago, LCC claimed to put "students first" and made diversity a core value. But something else turned out to be more important, so those claims are now meaningless.

It's money, of course. They say they can't afford to offer classes that don't fill. Interest in the humanities is waning in American society; the Trump phenomenon illustrates that. But LCC could choose to lead in a positive direction, instead of following the downward path.

Solutions: 1. Vote for legislators who value broad-based, thought-provoking humanities education. 2. In the posting for the new president, offer \$150,000 instead of \$300,000, and use the savings to keep programs and classes. (Some say they must offer the moon to get the best

VIEWPOINT BY GUY MAYNARD

The Toll of Teeth

Don't label those without access to dentistry

What do you think when you see someone with bad teeth — big gaps or the disturbing discoloration of decay or the sunken-jaw look of too many missing teeth — someone who covers his or her mouth when talking, someone who seems afraid to smile? Dangerous? Criminal? Drug addict?

Well, in some cases that might be true, but in most cases it's not. And the judgments that you and I — often unwittingly — make about people with visibly bad teeth can be a barrier to those people overcoming difficulties in their lives.

It is true that many homeless people have serious dental problems. Josie McCarthy, manager of FOOD for Lane County's Dining Room program, which serves up to 300 free meals a day four days a week, estimates that 75-90 percent of clients have problems with their teeth. Kim Freuen, clinic coordinator at White Bird dental clinic, says that about 10 percent of the clinic's patients are homeless and "it would be rare that we see a homeless person whose teeth are in good shape."

Sometimes drug use, methamphetamine use in particular, is the cause of the problem. But more often, it is conditions that led people to homelessness or the reality of life as a homeless person that are the main factors. People who end up homeless often grow up in traumatic situations where they never learn the basic habits of good dental health. And once people become

homeless, it's really hard to take care of their teeth.

"If you have nothing, everyday you're looking for food, you're looking for water and where you can sleep, trying not to lose your belongings," Freuen says. "So teeth are kind of down the list."

And once teeth become visibly bad, they become an obstacle to employment and housing, exacerbating difficulties that make it hard for people to find a way out of homelessness. Their often already fragile self-esteem is shaken and they lose self-confidence. Maybe worst of all, they find it increasingly difficult to have routine conversations with people who react without thinking to a damaged or diseased mouth.

Chris Plourde, a 51-year-old resident at a homeless Safe Spot managed by Community Supported Shelters, ran into that sort of passive hostility when he was a student at Lane Community College. When he first started there, he described himself as "kind of chatty." But he sensed other students recoiling from him. One teacher repeatedly avoided him. Another challenged the originality of a paper on a subject he cared deeply about and had spent a great deal of time researching and writing. All, he believes, because of the appearance of his teeth — the result of a degenerative disease that runs in his family.

"It's a perception problem," Ploude says. "Most of the time, it was just fear — and I couldn't bring myself to be angry at them because they were afraid [after] seeing instances where people are homeless and are acting out in really aggressive ways. I'm like, 'I get it — but I'm not that person.'"

But it took a toll on Ploude, who had overcome a battle with depression earlier in his life. "Then, I could say that all of that stuff originated inside of me so I felt empowered because if I'm the problem, then I could be the solution," he says. "But this was coming from outside of me and it seemed like an obstacle that no matter what I did, I'd just get this fear. Imagine going up to someone and getting that reaction and knowing that no part of it is coming from anything you are doing."

So what can the rest of us do to break down this perceptual wall that increases the separation between homeless people and us? Be aware of our prejudices. Hold off before labeling someone with bad teeth a drug addict or a criminal or some other dangerous type. Give them a chance to be themselves. Support agencies like White Bird and HIV Alliance that provide dental services to those who can't get them otherwise and The Dining Room and Community Supported Shelters and the Mission that feed and shelter homeless people so they can better address issues like dental problems.

Chris Plourde has a pretty basic hope for the end result of the process he is currently undergoing to get his teeth fixed: "Simply that I would have normal interactions with others. It's easy to take that for granted until it ceases to be available."

Guy Maynard is a Eugene writer who volunteers for Community Supported Shelters and the Dining Room. A longer story on this subject is available on the CSS website, communitysupportedshelters.org.