

# A Regrettable Error

*What ever happened to Cannery Square?*

You've heard of the cart before the horse? This is the property sale before the plan. It's also swift action to forestall any prolonged controversy over the Courthouse Garden. Even more potentially disruptive than students demonstrating against pesticide spraying and people protesting coal trains seems to be the fear of students carrying shovels and hoes, brandishing tree limbs, and marching like Burnham Wood out of Macbeth to save their garden. That fear is misplaced.

One of the hazards of a largely policy-oriented and opportunistic downtown plan is that proposals come along that the city is not prepared for. That seems to be what is happening right now with the proposal by NW Community Credit Union to buy the two-acre block next to the new Federal Courthouse along 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.

The issue isn't whether a credit union is a good use on the site, although I admit it wasn't at the top of my list. It's how a proposed three to four story building, and especially its large parking lot, might help to further an urban design concept plan for the end of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave., our Great Civic Street, as it arrives from downtown and connects to the riverfront.

The problem really isn't the garden or the credit union, although it a shame to lose all that food production and a place for offenders to till the soil. The problem is that there is no agreed upon concept plan for the area and the realization that our civic design aspirations aren't adequately present and shared so that they might influence the site planning of this iconic site. It is an important site that has a bigger role to play than any one particular use.

Does anyone remember our Downtown Plan? Eugene downtown was to be open for business and set into a framework of Great Streets. In the plan, Willamette St. is recognized for its importance as our Great Butte-to-Butte Street, the spine of Eugene; Broadway is an entrance into downtown from the east; Historic 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. would carry us right into the EWEB riverfront development. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, running from Willamette St. and the Park Blocks to the Federal Courthouse and Cannery Square to the Downtown Riverfront, was to be our Great Civic Street. Remember?

A regrettable error, I believe, was to leave this triangular block, which is the forecourt to the courthouse and the foyer to the riverfront out of the EWEB master planning - not to mention the leftover need to improve connections in all directions from an awkwardly sequestered courthouse.

Access and arrival at the riverfront needs to be more of a crescendo than just a parking lot and street and railroad crossing. A proposal by Wallace Roberts and Todd, a San Francisco firm the city hired to look at the area some ten years ago, proposed an arrival at a Cannery Square on the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Ferry St. They showed a smaller park blocks-like square, on this end of 8<sup>th</sup>, mimicking the one downtown. The idea was to create a public space at Ferry St., honoring the former cannery and serving as a hinge to the riverfront. We should be asking ourselves, "What ever happened to Cannery Square?"

Cannery Square, Courthouse Garden, NW Community Credit Union, access to the riverfront, a fitting Federal Courthouse foyer, perhaps even a reappearance of the Millrace – couldn't they all get along?