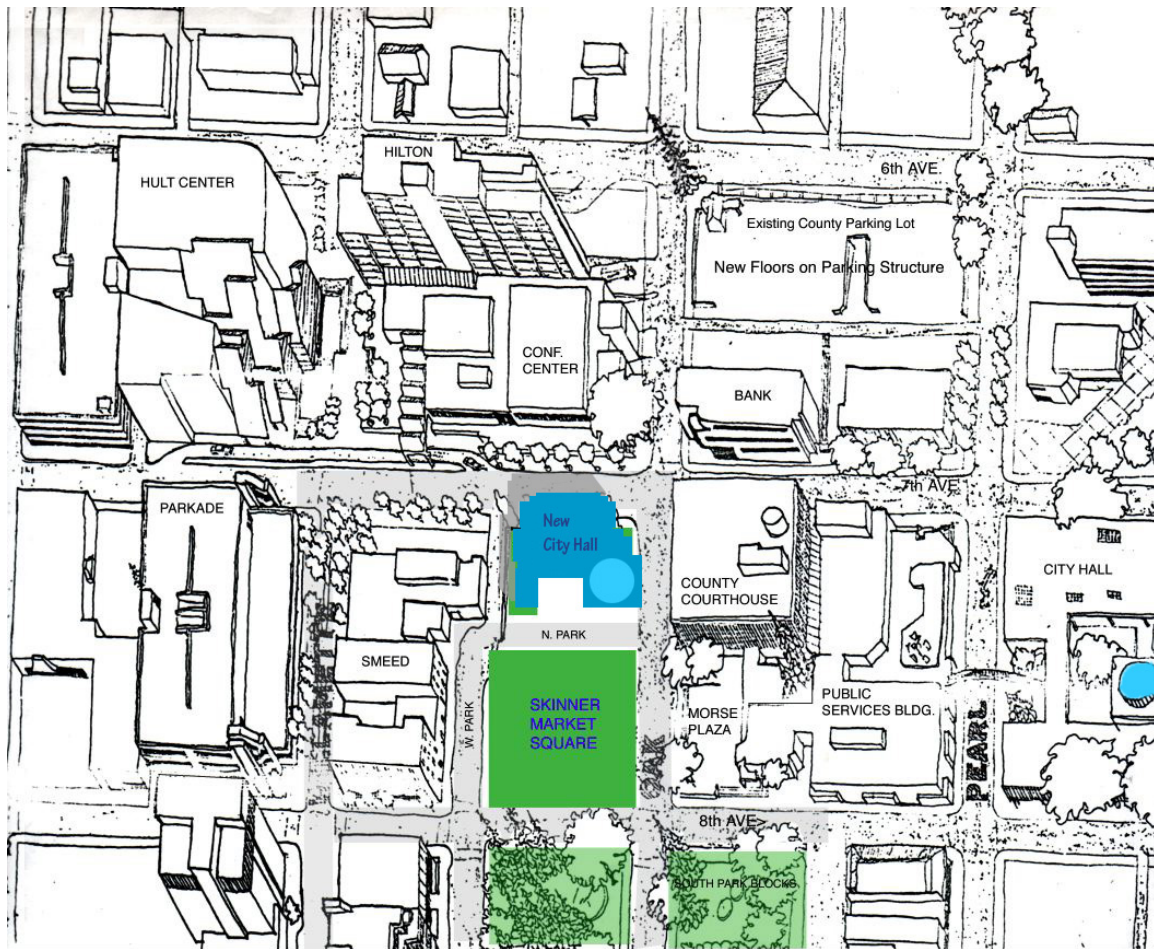


Design Matters

Mar. 16, 2014



The Third City Hall Redux

Rhymes with aw-shucks, but since many of you have asked me what a new City Hall on the North Park Block might look like and what would happen to the existing council chamber and mural, I propose something like this. The council chamber building, as it turns out, has its own separate structure and is movable. It would need to be moved nearby anyway under the present 8th Ave. scheme, and I think it would have a much more striking, important and symbolic public presence if located on Oak St. (see above) across from the County Courthouse.

Once upon a time there was an access road through the Butterfly Garage called N. Park just as there is an E. Park, W. Park and S. Park today. In this scheme it would return as access to the new City Hall's below level parking and Skinner Market Square. And City Hall itself would be a glorious, south-facing, four-story structure of

confidence and stature that commanded the city's most important central and historic open space. The awkward and sloping Butterfly Garage level would flap and fly away, and the bustle of our markets would un-squeeze themselves away from 8th Ave. to sell and celebrate in the new square

What's the matter with the 8th Ave. site? Well, we've gotten used to it, but it's just not the same. When City Hall occupied - and was - the whole block, when it weighed in equally with the Public Services Building across the street, it could create its own significance and public meaning. If it gets reduced to a 20,000 square foot mostly office building along 8th, it will no longer be able to hold its own or add much needed excitement to the street environment. Instead of a Park Block foyer, it will have only the city parking lot across the street.

What about other suitors for the N. Park Block site? Unsurprisingly there are others nearby, namely those desiring to replace the aging and worn-down County Courthouse, who have long had their eyes on the site. My choice, if anyone really wanted to know, would to rebuild the County Courthouse on its present site with a better face out onto a new City Hall, Council Chamber and N. Park Block. But this is and should be an important public decision, just like the present one about how to make a new City Hall, and I think both need much more public discussion than they're getting.

Why are we in this present position? Two reasons: The City spent \$2,000,000 in fees for the first \$130,000,000 City Hall proposal and now has only an \$11,000,000 building budget remaining, putting itself in the too big - too small, Goldilocks situation I described earlier. But the more important reason I think is that the Great Recession has, and I hope only temporarily, sapped everyone's energy and confidence. Small may be beautiful, but too small is still too small. And one place is so much better than the other.

Jerry Diethelm