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## West End plan

Ernest Bonner

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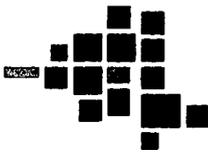
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**Ernie Bonner**  
Portland, Oregon

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September 1, 2000

Vera Katz, Mayor  
City of Portland  
City Hall  
Portland, OR 97210

Mayor Katz:

I am not often surprised by things I see going on in Portland. With 30 years of looking around, I have seen a lot.

But something happened the other day that really stunned me.

For the past 3 or 4 years I have been following (and, I thought, contributing) to the discussion of policy and development in the West End (formerly West of Broadway) District in downtown Portland. As you know, a West End Steering Committee has been meeting for about a year taking public comment and considering proposals by the Planning Bureau staff to promote the development of that district—which they defined as bordered on the East by the Park Blocks.

During this period, I and others have been offering suggestions for the development of a major retail center on and around the so-called Commercial Park Blocks. The Steering Committee has not officially come to a conclusion about the matter. The Chairman of the Steering Committee, also the Chairman of the Planning Commission, though, has stated that he was not in favor of extending the Steering Committee's review of the proposals to include the Park Blocks.

In July of this year, the Steering Committee met for the final time, and considered the Planning Bureau staff recommendations for the West End.

Just before that meeting, the truth began filtering out of the Portland Development Commission.

While the Steering Committee and the Planning Bureau were laboring (in full public view) over the future of the West End, the Portland Development

Commission staff had been over the last year developing their own plan just across Ninth Avenue from the West End. As far as I know, this effort was not known to any of the Steering Committee or the Planning Bureau staff—as strange and unbelievable as that may seem.

More recently I have been able to view two reports from the Development Commission:

"Midtown Blocks: Urban Potential," June 2000, PDC; and

"Concept design: The Midtown Blocks", May 1999, PDC.

Both of these publications indicate to me that PDC had been preparing a plan for the Commercial Park Blocks and adjoining blocks over the past year or more.

And all during that time, I heard not a word about the PDC effort, nor were there apparent attempts to integrate what the PDC was doing on the Park Blocks and what the Steering Committee was considering in the West End—even though the two efforts had the common boundary of SW Ninth Avenue.

For those of us who are genuinely interested in a re-invigoration of the West End, and who had spent some considerable time and effort in trying to understand the issues and respond constructively, this discovery was puzzling. Why did the Steering Committee open up the discussion of the West End to the public, but not inform us that other processes were underway as well—processes that would not be made known to us during the planning process for the West End? Are the Development Commission proposals real? How will they affect the Planning Bureau proposals for the West End? Why were the public invited to participate in one process but not the other?

I think you, as Mayor of this great city, do a great job of making contact with people, and setting aspirations for them. I also think you, as much as any of our current elected officials, understand the reason and the benefits of broad public participation in the affairs of the city; and open understanding of what the City is doing, and why.

And that's why I have a hard time understanding. What is going on here?

Is this just a simple case of one agency being assigned one thing and another agency being assigned something else, and the two not relating to one another, even though the two assignments are related? Or is it a case of one agency withholding information from another agency for some unknown reason? Why did this happen? Is this an isolated incident? Does this event portend even more serious incidents in the future? Most important, how can citizen trust in their government survive this behavior by its officials? We would like to know.

Portland has a great tradition of constructive public participation in the affairs of the City. This tradition can be traced as far back as the original platting of the Park Blocks and continues through the 1919 zoning plan, the Portland Hotel, the Downtown Plan, Pioneer Square and Waterfront Park.

We can do better. Right?

Respectfully,



Ernie Bonner

Cc: Rod O'Hiser; Sam Galbreath