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Staff Report: Ernie Bonner

Ernest Bonner

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Portland Planning Commission Reunion
August 3, 2000: Lowellhorst

Staff Report: Ernie Bonner

As you can imagine, over the 25 or 30 years since the Commission last met, the staff has accumulated a lot of reports for your consideration and recommendation.

The Franz Bakery called to see what the Planning Commission would think about their application for a permit to install an electronic sign over their bakery on NE 12th Avenue, near Benson High. I told them they would get the permit over Mike Katz's dead body--but they applied anyway.

Enron, the recent buyer of Portland General Electric, called to say they were considering whether to ask for permission to add another 7 stories to their downtown building complex. The Enron President inquired whether Margie Gustafson, the Planning Commission member with the "sweet stiletto" who originally questioned the building's design height, was still on the Commission or was she safely in Washington, DC. ~~He asked that I please advise him of her status.~~

Another Hearings Officer has retired. She complained that she had too much to do, and recommended that the City assign more of the hearings responsibility back to the Planning Commission. The new Planning Director, Gil Kelley, called me for my opinion on the matter, and I referred him to Hardy Myers. Gil called later and said that he had asked Hardy for his thoughts, but Gil couldn't quite make out what he said. Gil said it sounded sort of like

"BBBRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACCCCCCKKKKKKKKKK!"
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Just about 25 years ago, the Planning Commission recommended the vacation of 4 blocks of right of way for Northwest Natural Gas. Just last month I made my usual tour of Planning Commission actions and discovered that

development has occurred on 3 of the blocks involved without the need for the street vacation. I mentioned it to Bing and he will offer a resolution to rescind the street vacation, for the Commission's consideration this evening.

On January 26 of 1973, Mayor Goldschmidt recommended that the Council re-appoint four of the Planning Commissioners: Peggy Eckton, Herb Hardy, Rowland Rose' and Marvin Witt. He also recommended the appointment of 5 new Commissioners: Hardy Myers, Marjorie Gustafson, Bing Sheldon, Ocie Trotter and Bill Wessinger. The next day these appointments by the Mayor were criticized. Ivancie expressed 'surprise.' McCreedy was 'shocked.' Commissioners Schwab and Anderson asked for a talk with the recommended appointees before confirming. Four days later the City Council, in informal process, reined in the Mayor with an appointment process for all future appointments to Mayor, Council, Boards or Commissions. And just under a week later, all of the new appointees were sworn in. Over the past 25 years, that process has never again worked that quickly. Mayor Katz wants to know: How did they do that? I told her she should call Bill Scott or Ron Buel.

Many of you know that the bulk of new ^{central city} residential development has occurred outside of downtown, in the new Pearl and River Districts to the north. This has given rise to Pearl envy among West End land owners who have advanced proposals to rezone all of the high-rise Residential zones in the West End to Commercial. I have attended several of the hearings on the proposal and pleaded for the salvation of the Planning Commission's vision of the Downtown Plan for housing in the area. The Business and Citizens' Committee with the responsibility for developing a proposal for the City Council was not impressed. One member of the Committee was surprised that there was a Planning Commission way back then. I told him to call Bill Wessinger, who could assure him that there was a planning commission way back then--in fact, there was a planning commission even before way back then.

I know Sharon Roso will remember the joint meeting with the School Board where the possibility of instituting middle schools in Portland was discussed; and the joint meeting of the Planning Commission and the Development Commission on the needs of the neighborhoods. But how many of you will remember the shortest meeting of the Commission--our hearing in the Model Cities area to review the Union Avenue Redevelopment Plan? The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm. At 7:35 pm Ms Hildress Benson took the mike and refused to leave. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm--in the midst of Ms Benson's testimony.

And maybe some of you recall the Planning Commission retreat at Gearhard, where it is rumored that John Russell danced on the piano during one of our long recesses from business.

I don't know whether you all knew that Nick Barnett and Ocie Trotter were aspiring weekend sailors. After a hard night at a Commission hearing or a Housing Authority meeting they would split for the San Juans (for a week of what they would call sailing, but I would call drifting.) ☺

Ocie passed on several years ago. And so did Herb Hardy. Peggy Eckton is gone as well. ~~And maybe others I have forgotten.~~ We all remember them fondly, and with respect for their contribution to Portland. They were all part of what some like to recall as the "Golden Age of Portland."

And every so often I will get a call from someone who either wants the old Planning Commission back or is glad they are no longer there. That shows you what a damn good job you must have done--in trying circumstances.

This will be my last staff report of the millenium. At the next historic planning commission meeting, I will either be dead or

too damn old to stand up and talk. I enjoyed our association. You were an inspiration to me, and a force for caring and reason in the City. I congratulate you one and all.

Thank you, Hardy.