

OPINION

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What happened with The Village brought us to where we are now

The Village was approved by the Arcata City Council

I read your article on the HSU Craftsmans Mall housing plan, where you stated that a “downsized version of the Village died on a tied City Council vote in 2019.”

I thought NO! we (the City Council in 2019) passed the Village project 4-0, with Michael rescinding himself. I went back to check, in the trusty annals of minutes kept by Bridgit Dory of the City of Arcata, and on June 5, 2019 it says:

“By General Consensus, the Council gave its approval to move forward with the project as it was currently presented as far as the number of units, type of units, percentage split, etc., as laid out by the Council in April 2019.”

We were unanimous in the vote!
Just keeping the record straight.

Susan Ornelas
Former Arcata City Council and Mayor

Note: The tied council vote which rejected The Village did take place in 2018, not 2019. And the council did take a straw

❖ LETTERS

vote to move forward with The Village the night of June 5, 2019. But that approval was only conceptual, and not on a finished project. The June 5 meeting's staff report on the matter states:

“The Council cannot take action on the project until the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) review is complete. This item is to provide the Council the opportunity to review the project approval documents and the current project. Staff will incorporate Council direction in a future meeting to consider certification of the EIR and final approval of the project.”

The Village EIR was unusable on June 5, having been prepared by a firm hired by project applicants Coleraine Capital/AMCAL Equities LLC. The Land Use Code requires an independently prepared EIR, so a CEQA specialist was set to be hired at the expense of the applicant to perform an analysis of the EIR, to verify its objectivity. The council also asked for more changes to the project's housing makeup,

requiring still another redesign.

But The Village was never to return to the council for final approval, and the CEQA consultant was never hired.

After 17 or more city meetings over a two-year period, with hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on multiple designs to satisfy shifting council direction, and despite reminders from city staff, the applicants may have had the Sunk Cost Fallacy in mind as they refrained from any follow-up over the remaining six-plus months of 2019, and the project went dormant.

Finally, in May 2020, the developer confirmed that The Village project was no more. That left the council's 2018 rejection as the final vote on a complete project.

But that's all moot, since the Craftsman Mall property is now in state hands and its new, 800-student housing development (using council-rejected plans for The Village as a design reference) is exempt from city regulations. — Ed.

The origins of evil

There are many different belief systems regarding the origins of evil. Perhaps each one

has a fragment of truth. “Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.” is certainly an accurate statement. Most have forgotten that a million people died in 1840s Ireland, when laissez faire capitalism demanded the continued payment of land rents through the export sale of food grown on it even after the potato crop Irish farmers lived off was blighted.

Now one million children in Afghanistan are malnourished, starving, and freezing because Afghan assets are frozen in the World Bank, not released to NGOs, hospitals, U.N. relief agencies, schools and civil servants to keep the country running and recovering least the Taliban receive any of it.

Funds released can go directly to the above named institutions to be used effectively to save the people. They do not have to go to the Taliban that denies equal rights to women, nor should they.

The U.S. froze \$7 billion of Afghan Central Bank's near \$10 billion in assets held by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. If this money is not released it is expected that this winter more will die than died in 20 years of war.

Margo Gross
Arcata

Current plans and projects exemplify classic Arcata values

As mentioned in last week's paper, the Craftsman Mall student housing project is currently out to bid, awaiting approval. Given that HSU has the money and the expertise to undertake a big project, and given their track record in new construction with the recent College Creek apartments on campus, along with the superb signage that has sprung up at significant intersections in the same style, providing the campus a uniform identity that it never had and badly needed, I, for one, expect that HSU will do a great job turning a dystopian junkyard of broken and rusting metal sheds and beat up equipment scattered about the 11 acre site of muddy disarray at the end of St. Louis Road into a fine, 800 person habitation for 21st Century HSU students.



❖ THE FUTURE OF ARCATA
Daniel Duncan
Second of two parts

And then there is Arcata's biggest and boldest idea for future growth, the Gateway Area Plan now undergoing review by the Community Development Department which is inviting public comment over the next several months. This development will entail zones for housing, apartments, single family residences, new businesses, renovations of existing structures, bike lanes and parks, traffic redirections and general beautification of the landscape. And the big question for all of us concerned citizens is what and where and how much and who and why and everything else about such a project that will impact the identity of our city for years to come.

Then and now

When I came into Arcata way back in 1970, there was a shortage of housing then too. There were city lots with no houses on them and yet Caltrans was busy removing several houses in the way for new onramps, bridges and the other freeway installations. A guy I was working for at the time, Bill Carpenter, kept telling me to go down there and buy one of those Craftsman houses up on blocks that Caltrans was selling for \$100 just to get it out of the way. He told me go find a bank and get a loan to move the house, put a down payment on one of the empty lots in town, transport the perfectly good house onto its new foundation — made by me — give \$5000 to the mover from Redding, and then finance the whole thing with the

same bank that lent me the money for the mover. I could have my own house for less than \$10,000. What sane person could turn down such an opportunity?

Me for one, for I was happily at work building Bill's garage. At the time, I was installing new old growth 1 by 12 redwood siding, to be mitred at the corners of the building, which required the utmost patience, a steady hand, and every bit of my skill to perform correctly with my old sidewinder power saw turned at a 45. When the joint came true, that is, with no gaps, I couldn't feel any prouder of myself than if I were a 19th century carpenter reborn in the modern period. I told Bill — a man I deeply respected as I tended to feel towards every Arcata elder I met who had nothing but good sense

about life to offer me — to leave me alone with his schemes for a quick buck. I liked what I had (at the time, a small house down Elk River Road on an acre that had flooded which the desperate owner turned over to us for \$1,000 down and a \$9,000 total sale price.) And besides that, I had by then also enrolled myself into the university, having fallen in love with a philosophy professor named Dr. Howe, and I was too absorbed figuring out Plato's Ideas to want to distract myself



❖ DEMOCRACY IN ACTION As city staff discussed the Gateway Area Plan inside the Community Center Saturday, some of the plan's skeptics tabled outside the entrance. This kind of creative tension also marked the great land use battles of the 1970s. KLH | UNION

with some mundane enterprise like moving a big house, even if I could get the whole damn thing for a hundred bucks.

There are some things, like feelings, that you can't force. You can't legislate attitudes either,



❖ GATEWAY GUY The author, Daniel Duncan, at Saturday's Gateway Area Plan Open House at the Arcata Community Center. KLH | UNION

I have learned. The character of a town is defined partly by its streets and buildings, and partly by the people who inhabit those streets and buildings in the present, whether these people made the environment they live in or didn't. For if philosophy taught me anything in college and after, it was this: the things of this world that we make to surround us in our daily lives represent our most determinative ideas about how to live life well. They are not just bricks in a wall with doors and windows of a certain material and design, but they are the very shapes that we think are appropriate for the particular function because they serve both our beliefs and tastes as well as facilitate the most intimate ways that we move in the world. We want

Plaza for decades and no longer represented the values of the modern Arcata temperament, it was time to remove it, to clear the space for the next thing.

'Making the Past Live Again'

But, as I said, you can't legislate attitudes. And I know some of you may think I am a bit of a hippie/carpenter snob for my point of view. But I have no regrets today about my youthful preoccupation with philosophy. True, I didn't get a practically free Craftsman house, but I ended up with Bill's friendship, which meant more than some house, and still does now thinking about him and who he was. He offered me a window into Arcata's soul that I kept finding in the old millworkers, loggers, truck drivers, heavy equipment mechanics, sawyers, timber cruisers, merchants, the shoe repair man, the bartender on the Plaza. They were all men like Don of Don's Donuts, plain speaking, generous, community minded. They knew how to do things. They had built Arcata. The houses of many of them might not be fancy, but they had integrity and style and were built to last.

This is the kind of thing we should keep in mind when we ask ourselves what we love about the place where we live and how we want it to grow. What makes it good? What about it do we want to keep? What values from the past do we want to preserve? Times change and people are going to have different tastes in different eras. I personally am not afraid of new ideas or new home designs. I like novelty and variety. But I want the new to fit with the old.

During my career as a builder in Arcata, my business was called Small World Construction. The world was small then — when you got to know it — and it still is in my opinion, even smaller now.

My company built new houses and restored old ones. Eventually I settled on doing restorations. One of my tag lines was “Making the Past Live Again” because a lot of the old houses that came my way had been neglected by their owners who had fallen on hard times or they were simply under appreciated. By “living again” I meant living in the now, in the present, because if a house was well-built, it could serve the present again; a well-made building lasts longer than one generation.

Clearly, we here in the North Coast have been given our marching orders by the Powers That Be in Sacramento. Our university up on the hill, HSU, shall become a Polytechnic and the student body will increase by 5500 by 2028. The Trustees have, provided the University with \$458,000,000 to make this happen. As for Arcata, the city in which the university exists and serves (along with the youth of this great state that migrate up here to Humboldt) shall be put on notice about what is to come:

Growth, major population growth, is coming, like it or not.

Yes In My Back Yard

The City of Arcata will need to grow faster than it has ever had to, except during the gold rush. The days of one percent per annum population increase are over. Lots of new dwellings are going to be needed and sooner rather than later. Certainly the surrounding cities will have to do their part to provide housing for the HSU expansion. My personal preference to accommodate some of the growth is by infill. And I don't mean by that filling up every available space with blocky apartments. Given a recent change in the building code by the State, every parcel in California can now have three dwellings per residential lot. The posture of the state has changed from tolerating NIMBY to encouraging YIMBY. Yes In My Back Yard, one more living unit than before.

But there are many other possibilities and all the citizenry will have the opportunity to weigh in on the complex issue of growing but growing well. Whatever course we take, let's keep in mind that it's a small world out there. Yes, and it's all we've got, so let's be sure to get this thing done right. We owe it to ourselves to those who come after us.

End of part 2. Daniel Duncan ran Small World Construction in Arcata from 1986 through 2007. Contact him at dduncan362@gmail.com.