

From No Way! to Better Way

Salemians who stopped last year's poorly thought-out Boise Cascade redevelopment plan, pat yourselves on the back (or wherever you like to be patted).

Saying No Way! to a land grab of part of beloved Riverfront Park, the Carousel parking lot, for an access road to apartments that would loom over the forthcoming pedestrian bridge to Minto Brown Island — that led to a Better Way.

A deal between the City and Mountain West Investment that adds 3.8 acres on the west side of the railroad tracks to Riverfront Park, resolving the access problem.

Along with apartments being built in a remodeled “ruins,” the decrepit warehouse that has been a Commercial Street eyesore. The previous plan would have left the warehouse as-is for a long time.

Let's embrace the citizen activism lesson here. No, more than that.

Let's chew on this experience; digest it; make it part of Salem's community involvement marrow; a source of energy to fuel other No Way! to Better Way campaigns.

I was pleased to play a role in the effort to stop the Carousel parking lot takeover. I was the first to point out that getting National Park Service approval for this (federal funds were used to build Riverfront Park) would take several years, at least.

Realization of this fact changed the development equation.

City approval of the parking lot access plan wouldn't allow apartment construction to start immediately. It would be years before this could happen, if ever, due to the need for a geekily-named 6(f) conversion application for Riverfront Park.

All I had to do was make a phone call to the state government point person who would coordinate the application review. When I talked with her, she

was surprised that others hadn't asked my obvious question: how long would the review take?

Citizen activism can be simple.

So I, along with many others, notably the people I like to call the Ferocious Carousel Defenders, stood up successfully to a bad development plan.

(Advice to real estate developers: do not mess with gentle souls who worked long and hard to fashion hand-crafted wooden horses into a ride for kids of all ages. They will rip you to shreds. Believe me.)

Opponents of the ill-fated Boise Cascade redevelopment plan were called negative boo-birds by those who wanted something, anything, to be done with the rubble-strewn property.

Turns out they were wrong. Putting a stop to a bad idea led to a much better idea. This was the goal of the citizen activists all along: find a win-win for Mountain West Investment and the public, not a win-lose.

All is not completely rosy with this Boise Cascade 2.0 picture, though.

The Salem City Council approved the deal lickety-split (love that word) with virtually no opportunity for citizens to express opinions about it.

If the deal was so good for Salem, why didn't the City Council take a few weeks and let people ask questions and get answers?

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com