

## **Mountain West Investment, Be Creative With Riverfront**

An uncreative, unexciting plan to put rental apartments and a nursing home on Salem's downtown riverfront has been given up by the would-be developer of the old Boise Cascade property, Mountain West Investment.

Good news.

Virtually everybody in Salem except rubble lovers wants to see something done with this urban wasteland. But "something" isn't the same as "anything." Going ahead with a bad project would have been worse than what we have now:

An opportunity to make this area adjacent to Riverfront Park a place that elicits Wow!'s, not ho-hums.

Google "urban land institute Salem." Read the report that pops up. Nationally-recognized experts came here in 2006. They spent five days studying the Boise Cascade property. Their report concludes with a quote from noted architect Daniel Burnham.

"Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will themselves not be realized. Make big plans, aim high in hope, and work, remembering that a noble logical diagram, once recorded, will not die."

Well, Mountain West Investment made some little plans without blood-stirring magic.

They won't be realized, mostly because taking over part of the Carousel parking lot for a private access road to apartments on the west side of the railroad tracks ran afoul of a federal funding commitment the City made to keep Riverfront Park in public recreational use for perpetuity. Forever.

Now the outline of a better plan for the Boise Cascade property is becoming clear: make all of the land west of the tracks part of Riverfront Park. That eliminates the access problem. The land east of the tracks has easy access via several streets.

Then return to the Urban Land Institute vision: reconnect downtown with the river. Focus on what is special about this property, Pringle Creek and panoramic views of the Willamette. The report says:

“The best market would be for restaurants. Well-designed spaces that take advantage of riverfront views could attract 5,000 to 20,000 square feet of restaurant and specialty food outlets.”

Freaking absolutely!

Yet amazingly, Mountain West Investment claimed the Salem market wouldn't support a downtown riverview restaurant. To which I say, get out of the way and let another developer take over planning for the mixed-use zone on the east side of the railroad tracks.

Put shops and eateries along Pringle Creek walkways. Build retail and office space for companies with an environmental, recreational, or agricultural vibe. Have a bike and boat rental shop combined with a brewpub near the end of the soon-to-be-built Minto Brown Island pedestrian bridge. Offer condos and apartments with green design.

Supporters of the original development have been telling people like me, “Hey, if you don't like the Mountain West Investment plan, buy the property and develop it yourself.”

Great idea.

How about using the emerging notion of real estate crowdfunding? Might work. Many Salemites would back a downtown riverfront development that was appealingly strange. Meaning, excitingly blood-stirring.

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