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8/10/27 • Publisher: NewsLanc.com, LLC • Volume II, No. 169

The future of downtown Lancaster by Robert E. Field, Investor Builder

We cannot go back and correct perhaps the biggest mistake in the history of the city and county: The development of an oversized, overly costly hotel and convention center on the valuable Watt and Shand site rather than, as had been recommend by the 1988 Winterbottom Report, building a smaller convention center at Lancaster Square to revive the Brunswick Hotel and developing a mixed use residential / commercial complex on the Watt and Shand site.

Here is what we foresees happening over the next two decades:

WITHIN FIVE YEARS: Because the value of land alone now exceeds the value of the land with improvements, the Redevelopment Authority of Lancaster will have acquired and razed all of the Lancaster Square block apart from the parking garage. The vacant site will be developed into upscale mid-rise condominium apartments with some townhouses to add variety. Its success will encourage further upscale development for blocks as far north as Lancaster General Hospital.

WITHIN TEN YEARS: The current Marriott Hotel will operate under a less prestigious franchise flag or as an independent. Based upon its economics, the owner, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Lancaster (RACL), and the tenant, Penn Square Partners (PSP), will not spend upwards of \$10 million required to meet evolving high and expensive Marriott Standards.

BETWEEN TEN AND FIFTEEN YEARS: The current Lancaster Newspapers offices fronting on the first block of South Queen Street will be vacant. Although it will be one of the last dailies

nationwide to cease publishing a traditional newspaper, the flight of subscribers and advertisers to the Internet will eventually only justify the relatively small scale publication of its *LancasterOnline.com*. A vacant newspaper building across from a convention center that is dormant two-thirds of the year will create a totally dead block and further block gentrification to the south.

BETWEEN FIFTEEN AND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS: The convention center will cease operations and perhaps be razed, PSP will have terminated its lease/ option, and the city owned hotel will repeat the experience of the former Hilton and current Brunswick, struggling to fill rooms and deferring necessary renovations. Both county and city taxpayers will have to pay off the bonds they have guaranteed from general tax revenues.

The above assumes:

1) Somehow the Convention Center's \$2 million to \$3 million annual deficit (once allowance is made for a 'Reserve For Renovations') will be somehow offset. To increase the Hotel Room Sales Tax would be unconscionable since county hotels have already been injured by the 5% tax and have lost appreciable business due to competition from the Marriott and the Convention Center. From where funds are to come presents a formidable challenge for the Convention Center Authority and the County Commissioners. Presumably within the next month we will hear about this from the commissioners.

2) That the Marriott Hotel is currently operating at least close to break even and thus will not be handed over to RACL at a much earlier date.

LETTER: PSP should be held responsible

“Penn Square Partners (PSP) strikes again....today’s’ (8/8) Convention Center article (by PSP shill Bernard Harris, naturally) has PSP taking MORE income from meeting room space located within the framework of the Convention Center; and using public funds for renovation expenses to boot!!!!!!”

“PSP is an embarrassment to all city and county taxpayers; it should be held solely accountable for the Convention Center financial success/default.”

LETTER: In defense of ‘Daddy Justice’, fathers’ rights advocate

“I am someone who has had the honor of spending two years around Ben Vonderheide, aka ‘Daddy Justice.’ His case is exactly as stated.

DA’s, and countless other government employees...all for a Disorderly Conduct charge...

“Ben went to expose corruption which was happening in the Berks County Courthouse. In trying to expose the truth, he was charged with Disorderly Conduct, even though a police officer who was much louder, shouting curse words, and jumping around, was not charged. Over the past two years I have witnessed the ‘Reading Railroad’ first-hand...

“Ben is a true hero. Lancaster and Berks Counties need a hero. Yes, Ben is hated by many lawyers, judges, politicians, police, feminists, and child protective services. There are just as many who admire him for his brave tactics, in exposing government abuse...”

“As Ben went further up the ladder of appeals, he was given increased punishment. In Judge Linda Ludgate’s courtroom, we were surrounded by 8 sheriff deputies, and Sheriff Weaknecht himself, 3

“It is not a business for Ben, and there is no pay for fighting the system, on behalf of the underdogs. He carries his camera to protect himself and his rights. I have seen and heard him talk many a father ‘off the cliff’ and away from violent action, when they’ve lost everything to the system...”

LETTER: Aggressive reporting causes fight or flight reaction

“I’m so tired of Ben’s minions using the reaction of people he decides to ambush as evidence of their guilt!

“Picture yourself in your back yard gardening. Your mind is a million miles away thinking about what you’re gonna have for dinner, or what your kids said to you that morning and out of nowhere

this loudmouth person appears yelling questions at you and moving rapidly towards you yelling louder all the time. In most people, this kind of ambush, caught completely off guard triggers the fight or flight response. and if you get up and start moving away, he follows you yelling all the time. If your fight response is triggered instead and you allow yourself to become angry and yell back, then of course you’re guilty of something too

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