Is The Brunswick Hotel victim of Lancaster City hypocrisy?

By Robert E. Field, Publisher and Investor Builder

Hiz honor Mayor Rick Gray has done a lot of good things, but when it comes to the Brunswick Hotel he has been blind to the City's role in how Lancaster Square East - the Brunswick, its vacant Annex, and the former Bulova Building – has become a downtown blight.

Gray is quoted by the May 4 *Intelligencer Journal / New Era* ("*Judge: Brunswick must make changes*") as saying *"It's for sale, but there's no agreement."* Who in their right mind would buy it to operate as a hotel? And will a subsequent owner be able to do any better given the market conditions?

When Sen. Hugh Scott dedicated Lancaster Square East in 1971, the downtown city block was meant to protect its retail establishments and commerce from flight to the suburbs.

The Hess Department Store and a four star Hilton Hotel opened to great fanfare and community expectations.   Unfortunately the department store came on line virtually simultaneously with the opening of the giant Park City Mall.   Hess closed its doors in a little over a year.

Moreover, since there was not enough hotel business in downtown Lancaster to justify the expansive and luxurious Hilton, it soon lost its prestigious flag and survived for decades as a training center for government employees bussed in from the Washington D. C. area and on what scant downtown hotel and food and beverage business was available.

Yes, on many days that the Convention Center is in use, it generates essential business for the Marriott. But the convention center does business less than half of the days of the year. If there was little market for a reputable downtown hotel before the Marriott, there is no market whatsoever post the Marriott for the Brunswick.

Thus Gray, who chose to financially support the development of the Convention Center Project and funding of the Marriott Hotel despite concerns of 78% of the county population, is far from blameless for the plight of the Brunswick.

Even more inexplicable, Gray is also accountable for the failure of Randy Patterson, City Planner, to come up with an overall renewal plan for the demolition of Lancaster Square East except for the parking garage and the subsequent development of a residential condominiums to meet the needs of the growing downtown luxury housing market.

Hotels per their design are not adaptable to residential or office use. Moreover, the 'footprint' of the Brunswick as part of the Lancaster Square East prevents a new structure apart from redesigning and redeveloping the rest of the site.

The City through its Redevelopment Authority of the City of Lancaster (or some new entity) ought to acquire the Brunswick, its Annex, and the former Bulova Building which is reportedly mired in bankruptcy court. Apart from the parking garage, Lancaster Square East needs to be leveled and then sold to apartment and townhouse developers.

If Gray and Patterson were open to suggestions and guidance from local real estate developers, the City would likely be well on its way to a solution which

would be a fitting legacy for Gray and Patterson. Instead Gray vents his frustrations on the hapless owners of the Brunswick (who are not themselves blameless) and buries his head in the sand when it comes to finding a real solution.

Wake up Rick Gray and Randy Patterson. Let's work together to get the job done.

The man who chose not to be our governor

Former three star Admiral and two term Congressman Joe Sestak announced yesterday that he would not be a candidate in the Democrat primary for governor. Then he went on to perhaps set a precipitous record by throwing his hat into the ring for the 2016 senatorial campaign in which he would face incumbent Republican Pat Toomey.

Why we asked? Sestak commanded an aircraft carrier battle group and was the *"first director of the Navy Operations Group (Deep Blue), which sought to redefine strategic , operational and budgetary policies in the Global War on Terrorism."* Certainly he would be able to quickly master the intricacies of the governor position.

And as a former two-term Congressman and a Democrat candidate who was barely defeated by Toomey in the 2010 Republican landslide, he has many contacts statewide and a sense of the local issues.

One can never tell for sure what is going on in another person's heart or what personal matters may be influencing their decision. And Sestak appears to be a very private person.

But there is no question that he has a passion for national defense and believes that much of our defense budget is going towards obsolete weaponry and could be much better replaced by modern technology.

On a recent visit, Sestak explained how during the cold war it was necessary to have our own atomic submarines shadowing those of the Soviet Union but how today modern methods can better and more precisely map submarine positions through use of sensors combined with satellite technology.

We very much regret that Sestak has chosen not to run for governor. We consider his chances of being elected governor in 2014 to exceed the likelihood of becoming senator in 2016. Moreover, he would be 63 when he took a senate seat. That means that by the time he would have status on committees in a second term, he would be in his early 70s. By a third term, when he would have a leadership position, he would be in his late 70s.

Contrasted to taking over responsibility for governing Pennsylvania in January, 2015, that is a long and speculative wait before having much influence. Moreover, with two terms as governor, he might be a candidate to become President. Now there is a position of maximum influence!

We wish him well. In the words of Joseph Campbell, *"Follow your bliss."*

Nevertheless, we mourn for Pennsylvania.