



Reproduced from the collections at Idaho State Archives/Records Center. This material may be protected by copyright law, Title 17 U.S. Code. ©2012

IDAHO STATESMAN MON JULY 15, 1981
 Debate rages over area's future

River Street poses dilemma

By TOM GROTE
 The Idaho Statesman

Like parents of an errant child, Boise city officials and developers have been asking themselves: What shall we do about River Street?

The area, south of downtown Boise, has been studied exhaustively and debated breathlessly, but there is little agreement on how it should be developed.

The city of Boise has set policies and spent a lot of money promoting the area as the ideal place for downtown workers to live. The city's success has been limited, however, and the slack has been taken up by developers who say only non-residential projects can work there for the time being.

A new debate on the future of the River Street area began two weeks ago when Boise accountant J. Robert Tullis and the Leonard C. Buck Trust applied to build a four-story office building on the north side of River Street between South 12th and South 13th streets.

The building, which the developers hope will be chosen as the future home of the federal Bureau of Land Management's state offices, would cover nearly a block.

The application caused the Boise City Council to balk because it knew such a large project could influence development in the rest of the area, much of which is vacant or contains dilapidated buildings.

The City Council voted 3 to 2 to reject the building after a debate in which several council members admitted they were torn on the subject.

Then, last Monday, council members changed their minds and voted 5 to 0 to approve the plan, although the message was made clear the action did not open the door to any other office developers.

Project designer Ernest Lombard said afterward that, even though he triumphed, "when you're all beat up, it's hard to feel like you've won."

Council members said they wanted yet another study of the area to provide guidance on future de-

velopments. The study would be added to six studies already performed between 1973 and 1979 on the area, defined as north of the Boise River, south of Front Street, east of Americana Boulevard and west of Capitol Boulevard.

The River Street dilemma started long before the first studies were finished. According to a 1973 study by Boise professional planner John L. Bertram, the area became the city's first fully developed residential area about 1910.

But the complexion of the area changed when railroad tracks were laid south of Front Street at about the same time. Industries and warehouses sprung up along the tracks, isolating the residential area and forcing out its more well-to-do resi-

dents.

Builder finds River Street rocky

Gerald Riedel is following the city's lead by proposing new housing in the River Street area, but he says the road has been rocky.

Riedel, of White-Riedel & Co., Real Estate, received approval from the city last fall to build a seven-unit townhouse at 609-611 Ash St. He then applied in December 1980 for federal financing from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

According to documents supplied by Riedel, HUD routinely sent the application to the Idaho Historical Society for review, which is where Riedel's troubles began.

State Historic Preservation Officer Merle Welles told HUD the area of Ash and Lee Street — including two small houses on Riedel's land which he planned to demolish — were of "architectural and historic importance" and should be preserved as a historic district.

HUD officials held up Riedel's approval of his financing until they could figure out what to do next. It was suggested to Riedel that he renovate the houses, but he said they were dilapidated, would require \$40,000 each to repair and could only be sold for \$25,000.

Riedel then was told he could demolish the houses after a detailed record of their existence was prepared, including photographs. The recording was performed at government expense.

Riedel said he finally received approval of his HUD financing last week, seven months after he applied for it, and construction should begin before the end of the summer.

Riedel said he may develop more housing in the River Street area, but his most recent experience has made him "very discouraged about going down there."

Neglect gradually eroded the area until the 1960s, when it became well suited to the term "wrong side of the tracks."

By the early 1970s, the city took new interest in the area and tried to breath new life into it. As the first studies were being done, an old grocery store was renovated in 1971 into the River Street Neighborhood Center. The city remodeled the 10-unit Grand Avenue Apartments in 1975.

The biggest investment in the area was the North Bank Project. The project cost about \$1.4 million in federal Community Development Funds between 1977 and 1980.

That project paid for such projects as the exten-

(See RIVER, Page 4A)

(Continued from Page 1A)

sion of the Boise River Greenbelt, the painting of the 8th Street Bridge and construction of Pioneer Walk, which includes a new footbridge across the Boise River.

In 1978, the city officially destined the area for residential development in the Metro Plan, the city's master planning document.

Since then, 210 housing units have been built in seven projects, according to City Planning Department records. Eighty of those units are in the Shoreline Plaza senior citizens center, 675 S. 13th St., which was built entirely with public dollars in 1978.

Federal Community Development funds also were used to buy the site of the 44-unit Pioneer Square on Grand Avenue at the Pioneer Walk. The land was purchased for \$207,500 and sold to Planned Development Inc. for \$107,500 in 1979, according to city records.

Winston Moore is perhaps the the single largest investor in the River Street area. Moore is the mastermind behind the 8th Street Market-place, which is turning run-down warehouses into shops and restaurants.

He also is the developer of Forest River, a 20-acre, mixed-use project begun in 1979 and expected to eventually extend between 9th and 13th streets south of River Street.

So far the area has sprouted a few office buildings and the Family Fitness Center, but no homes, despite at least 300 condominiums drawn into Forest River's master plan.

Moore said the residential phase will depend on the economy.

"There's always a possibility it won't work at all," he said. "The odds are against it happening as long as the property north of River Street stays the way it is," he added.

Moore calls the Buck-Tullis office building "a blessing" because he believes it will spur more development — residential as well as business — and transform the area into an attractive one for potential residents.

Lombard agreed, saying new office space probably must be built before residential development can

succeed. He said the two uses likely would be mixed, like European cities where "people live above their stores or above their offices."

Lombard said the city should stop trying to create new residential areas and try to preserve existing residential areas such as the Near North End, where many homes have been converted to offices.

Boise City Planning Director Susan Stacy, a promoter of residential uses in the River Street area, said it has never been shown that employees want to live near their offices.

"You have a range of incomes; people with families, people who want to live near schools; people will live where they can afford to live," Stacy said.

The slow residential growth in the River Street area is not due to any peculiar aspects of the neighborhood, Stacy contends, but merely reflects the poor housing market in the rest of the city.

She said it is laudable to hope offices will spur other developments, but Stacy said the fact remains that each non-residential project takes away a little more land on which homes could have been built.

River