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Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Tank House/Varsity

by Jim Becket

Special points of interest:

- Plans for the Varsity/Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer properties up for DHRMC review.
- Next meeting of the Commission August 15, 6:30 PM at Varsity.
- The City sent out a Request for Proposals/Qualifications
- Of four responses, the City selected one from Jon Fenske and Sinisia Novakovic

Developing plans for the Varsity Theater, the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Tank House, and the D-H-B Mansion were a major topic of discussion at the Davis Historical Resources Management Commission Meeting of July 25, 2005. Ken Hiatt, Economic Development Manager for the City, presented the proposals to the Commission for review and to “provide advisory comments on conceptual plans” for both the remodeling of the Varsity Theater and the D-H-B

Tank House Property. It was not a time of decision, but of update and review. The next meeting of the Commission, Au-



The Current Tank House
Photo by Valerie Vann

gust 15, 2005, will convene at the site for further review. Instead of the usual 7:30, the meeting will start at 6:30 PM outside the Varsity Theater. Following the discussion of the proposal, there will be a break to move to the Hattie Weber Museum for the rest of the meeting, opening again at 7:30 PM.

A brief summary of the background information provided in Ken Hiatt’s memo to the Commission

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Fair Access for the Twelve User Groups of 5th St. By John Lofland (jlofland@dcn.org, 758-5258)

There are at least twelve groups of legitimate users of Fifth Street between B and L in Davis, but one of them—the car driver—is given enormously more access to that public resource than are the other eleven.

I think this unjust imbalance of access is an instance of what is called

“institutional discrimination,” the unfair erecting of artificial barriers improperly to advantage one group and to disadvantage others.

The better to understand this line of thought, let us first step back and think in broad terms about (1) public resources and (b) citizen

access to them. After that, we can then consider such ideas as access discrimination.

I. In designing Davis city services, considerable attention is given to questions of equitable and fair access.

So it is that we in Davis and elsewhere are

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History Beneath Our Feet: The Bowers Addition Sidewalks by Merrily DuPree, Davis Historical Society

Like other American communities in the first decades of the twentieth century, Davisville became caught up in the romance of concrete, which lasted from the teens well into the forties. Although today the building material is commonly associated with urban sterility, when it first became widely available, it promised ordinary Americans the opportunity to beautify and individualize their homes at a reasonable cost. Not only could sidewalks and driveways of concrete largely eliminate the nuisances of dust and mud, but the mixture of cement, aggregate, and water could be used to create walls, lily ponds, garden benches, wishing wells, and small ornamental objects.

According to John Lofland's Old North Davis (1999), the first concrete sidewalk in Davisville was laid in 1913 by A.R. Pedder, a developer of



The 1913 date mark at Lot #5

land just to the north of the original town, which was owned by an investment group headed by Davisville resident Charles W. Bowers. Pedder completed sidewalks for all the new streets of the large subdivision, called the Bowers Addition. Today this section of Davis is known as the Old North, to distinguish it from later development farther to the north. Strikingly attractive by comparison with today's uninspired rectangles, the Addition sidewalks were comprised of 32" squares edged on two sides with

8" strips decorated with inscribed horizontal lines. Lot numbers and arrows indicating lot lines were stamped in the concrete, and the date 1913 was commemorated at two sites (623 G and between 609 and 613 D). Lofland quotes from advertisements in the Enterprise that encouraged townspeople to visit the subdivision and experience the unfamiliar sensation of walking on concrete while they viewed the lots. Although the response was seemingly enthusiastic, the city's governing body, the Board of Trustees, was in no hurry to follow Bowers' example. Many areas of the downtown remained without sidewalks, prompting the Women's Improvement Club in 1917 to put them at the top of its list of requests. And the Trustees continued to be committed to boardwalks; on May 17, 1920, they appointed a committee to investigate the "laying of sidewalks of beech between C and First so as not to destroy the trees." In January of 1923, the Citizens' Class of the Community Church presented yet another plea for sidewalks and felt it necessary to specify they were requesting the "laying of cement [my emphasis] walks along all property in the city of Davis." It wasn't until May of 1923 that the Trustees approved the ordinance that formally established their control of the construction of sidewalks outside property lines, beginning the process of providing them for all city streets. By this time, new walks would undoubtedly have been of concrete.

Amazingly, most of Davis's first modern sidewalk is still in use today. Much of the original concrete is in good shape and in a number of places the decorative lines, although worn, are still visible. Almost all the property-line arrows and lot numbers, along with the two 1913 stamps, have survived. Recently Valerie Vann, a member of the Old North Davis Neighborhood Association and the Davis Historical Society, discovered the name "Doyle," presumably the original purchaser of the lot, stamped in an Addition driveway extending from the sidewalk to the street at



Doyle Mark
Photo by Valerie Vann

717 Seventh Street. (Sidewalk watchers take note: there may be more names to be found!) Although not part of the original sidewalk, a number of curbs bear the historically significant stamp WPA, indicating they were constructed by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

The Bowers Addition sidewalk is a unique community resource that contributes immeasurably to the charm of the Old North. To walk on it is to be returned to a time when it was believed that useful articles should



Edge Markings, 600 Block

be aesthetically pleasing, that concrete sidewalks were a source of community pride. Davis is extremely lucky to have so much of the original walk ninety-two years after it was constructed, but if we

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especially concerned that public places, institutions, and amenities are not designed to set up barriers to their access for unfair reasons such as race, gender and physical ability.

These kinds of barriers to access have been made illegal and are thought of as racist, sexist, and in other terms indicating bias.

In thinking about barriers to access to public resources, it is quickly evident that some of them have the **effect** of unjustly barring users, but are not **intended** as such, or **recognized** as such, by their designers or operators.

The term "institutional discrimination" gives a name to this pattern. No one involved may consciously or intentionally seek to bar a group, but, even so, the social institutions of which these people are a part operate to produce that effect.

So, also, institutional discrimination needs remedy just as much as the consciously intended and designed kind.

II. The streets of Davis are a public resource. They are public places people have a legal right to use in an equitable fashion without imposition of discriminatory barriers.

I want now to suggest that the current debate regarding the re-design of Fifth Street between B and L might be an example of institutional discrimination. While not based on a feature such as race, the logic of its operation seems nonetheless the same. My suggestions regarding this are in two parts, a description of users and notes on their discriminatory treatment.

A. In asking myself and others

"who uses Fifth Street?" I have been surprised by the complexity and richness of the answer that develops (a fact perhaps reflecting my own unconscious bias). Arranged roughly from less to more numerous (or frequent), user groups include:

1) blind pedestrians, 2) wheel chair users, 3) walking-assisted pedestrians, 4) emergency vehicle drivers, 5) parent-small children pedestrians, 6) child pedestrians, 7) bus drivers, 8) big vehicle drivers, 9) delivery truck drivers, 10) adult pedestrians, 11) bike riders, 12) car drivers

More acute observers than I will doubtless discern additional user groups.

B. The Old North Davis proposal to redesign Fifth Street between B and L involves creating two bike lanes, a center left turn lane, and two main through lanes (among other features). (This is the existing design of B Street.)

1. In the some two years of discussion of this plan that has now gone on, I am struck by how opponents of it virtually never refer to the need for Fifth Street access of any but the last user on this list. Their pre-eminent concern is giving top, high speed priority to car drivers. The needs of others seem literally unspeakable (and such needs are perhaps unthinkable).

2. When pressed on the issue of fair pedestrian access to Fifth, The City of Davis Department of Public Works has responded with a plan for a complex, overhead apparatus that reminds one observer of a grade B video arcade. The noxious beeping and flashing these structures would create also seem to some more of an ugly design punishment for Fifth Street pedestrians than a thoughtful effort to provide them fair access. (Might this be a metaphoric "separate but

equal" remedy?)

3. Some car supremacists want explicitly to bar bike riders and tell them to go to Third Street. While it is illegal to ban bikes from Fifth Street, at least these car-ists are honest about their anti-bike feelings and car-ism.

4. One might argue that non-car users have no needs for access worth talking about and that this topic is therefore a non-subject. In fact, Old North Davis analysts have thought in detail and in a professional manner about other users and done assessments showing that user groups 4, 7, 8, and 9, especially, are all given short shrift in the current car-supremacist design. These and other users would have much more fair and just access under the Old North Davis design alternative. (Key here is understanding that some user groups are not organized and do not recognize, articulate, and act on their own interests. Consider physical disabilities before the disabilities rights movement. Silence clearly does not necessarily mean consent or satisfaction.)

My tentative conclusion about this remarkable fixation on the Fifth Street access supremacy of car drivers is that an unconscious "car supremacist" mind-set is at work.

Since it is unconscious, a first step in dealing with it is to try to bring it to consciousness. That is the major aim of this small essay.

With new consciousness, I hope we can start to end "car-ist" institutional discrimination. After all, we do claim to be the "bike capital of the world." This profession is certainly not given credence on Fifth, which is among our most bike-hostile streets.

Do we Have an Alternative to “Just Say No?”



Is there something we (i.e. DHS) can propose for this beat up old historical building besides demolition?

“The possibilities for saving the D-H-B Tank House from demolition do not look good.”

There are articles in this issue, as there have been previously, which touch on what might be termed (mildly) the City’s lack of attention to the historical character of our city. After a period in which guidelines were adopted and a conservation district developed, we are now in a period where such guides are either ignored completely or the processes involved rushed beyond recognition—often in the name of “economic development.”

In this issue: 1) The Fifth Street mess is the topic of John Lofland’s “Fair Access for the Twelve User Groups of 5th Street” article on page 1. Here, as was the case for the B/3rd Street discussion, a neighborhood group presented a well thought out plan to the City— with City

staff input in both cases. Both were virtually ignored. 2) Just north of fifth lies the area discussed so glowingly by Merrily DuPree (History Beneath Our Feet, Page 2) about sidewalks and “pedestrianism” in Old North. In addition to wanting to be able to safely cross to the world of commerce to the south, Old North is fighting to keep their unique walking privileges in their own neighborhood. In this instance, as Merrily points out, some progress is being made, in no small part through the efforts of Valerie Vann (go Valerie!) 3) The current Varsity/Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer situation is briefly described starting on Page 1. The possibilities for saving the D-H-B Tank House from demolition do not look good.

The situation is further complicated, it seems to us, because the Tank House is in

deplorable condition. Consequently, there are those, even in the historical community, who say “demolish it.” There are others who will fight demolition resolutely.

It seems to us that this is an issue that the DHS, as an organization which states as two of its purposes Education on, and Preservation of, Davis history should work to help find a solution. It will not be enough in this situation to just sit back and say “NO.” It will not be enough in this instance for City Staff, and later the City Council, just to hear individuals say NO.

Is it possible we might get together and develop a plan of action that might save the Tank House? Tank houses are historic relics. This one is one of two left in our town.

Might We Recognize Quality Restoration?



Restoration, or even upkeep, of an older building, is expensive. An owner must really want to do it, and the rewards are not very apparent in this community. However, those who care about

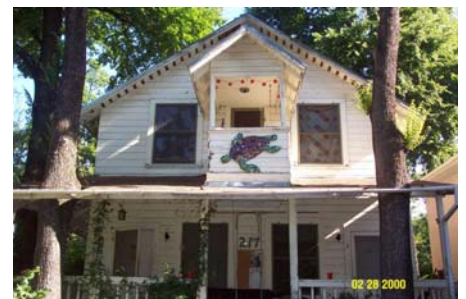
historical Davis appreciate it when an owner takes it upon themselves to do a nice job.

An example is shown to the left. The Montgomery House, a Merit Resource at 923 3rd, has recently been renovated, if not restored—yard as well as house. It is now one of the nicest looking Merit Resources in town.

Why not give the owner some sort of recognition for that effort?

Mike Harrington recently pur-

chased the house at 217 2nd, pictured below. It is not a Merit Resource, although its early history is interesting. Mike obviously has a long way to go, but he is intent on fixing it up and living in it. Why not follow his progress and reward his efforts?



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dated July 15, 2005, follows, with some direct quotes as indicated.

The City acquired the Varsity in 2004 and the Council directed staff "to circulate a Request for Proposals/Qualifications for the development and Management of the Varsity Theater." The RFP/Q also indicated the City's interest in the use of the commercial space connected to the theater, as well as the D-H-B Mansion and Pump House properties "to work in conjunction with the theater and provide a viable income to support the operation of the theater." (Emphasis added)

The absence of any reference to the historical nature of the buildings in question indicates the Economic Development Department's low, if not total, disregard

for things historical.

It is no wonder that the proposal also ignores history.

The City received four proposals and the Council selected one submitted by Jon Fenske and Sinisia Novakovic, and on June 7, 2005, the City Council/Redevelopment Agency Board authorized the City Manager to enter into an exclusive Negotiating Agreement (ENA) with Fenske/Novakovic.

Preliminary negotiations have been initiated and conceptual plans were being refined at the time of the meeting. It was emphasized that DHRMC was being given an opportunity for a preliminary review, with no formal action being requested at the July 25 meeting.

The project representatives at the meeting were Sinisia No-

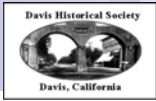
vakovic, owner of Mishka's Café, and project Architect Maria Ogrydziak. Neither made any reference to any plans which they might be considering to incorporate the historical aspects of the subject properties.

The main features of the proposal are 1) to use the theater to "present high-demand, critically acclaimed films on their release date," 2) to convert the current Clarence Cooper Insurance space into a combination small concession stand and small café, and 3) to develop the Tank House property "in a manner that would accommodate Miska's Café on the ground floor with restaurant or office uses above (2nd and 3rd floors).

(Editor's note: the above article is intended to be an unbiased account of the situation. Please see Page 4 for editorial opinion.)

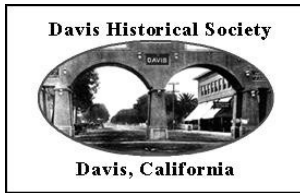
Below is the architect's rendering of the currently proposed project, looking south from 2nd Street. The Ice Café on the left occupies the current Cooper Insurance Agency location. The trees depicted are the two orange trees slated to remain. Mishka's Café will open to the west, with outdoor seating under the trees. There were no plans for the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Mansion presented.





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The Purposes of the Davis Historical Society*

The purposes of the DHS are to carry on programs of public education on the history of Davis, to encourage historical preservation in the Davis area, and to promote research and publication on Davis history, including the archiving of historical documents and artifacts.

The first letters of the five words summarizing these purposes spell the word "paper." These words are: Publication, Archives, Preservation, Education, Research.

* As listed on the Web

We're on the web!
davishistoricalsociety.org

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want to keep it we're clearly at the point where we'll have to conscientiously protect and maintain it. The city has a policy of retaining the old sidewalk and matching replacement sections to the originals, but this hasn't prevented some serious damage and unsuccessful attempts at replication.

Fortunately, Valerie Vann has recently proposed to the Davis Historical Resources Management Commission that the sidewalk on the west side of the 600



A lot line arrow, 600 block

block of G Street, along with associated easements and curbs, be designated a historical landmark. This section of the walk was the first laid and is in quite good condition, retaining almost all its distinctive characteristics including double arrows marking the southwest corner of the subdivision. She also calls for giving all sections of the sidewalk throughout the Bowers Addition containing arrows, lot numbers, and the second 1913 mark at least merit-resource status. Pointing out that damage has occurred "through ignorance, inadvertence, or carelessness during landscaping, construction, remodeling or conversion of residences," Vann is nevertheless confident that the most important sections of the sidewalk can be preserved if treated with respect. As a historical landmark/merit resource, they would be protected from hazards, such as construction equipment, tree roots, and front-yard fence posts, and sensitively maintained.

If you'll take time on one of these summer evenings to walk through

the tree-guarded Old North and pause every few steps to look down at the history beneath your feet, you'll understand why Davisites should support Vann's proposal. You may even begin to hope, as I do, that the HRMC may be persuaded to protect not just some, but all of the existing sections of Davis's first concrete sidewalk.



One of the 1938 WPA markings. Already painted red—what else might be coming?