

MCEUEN PARK TALK  
(July 12, 2014)

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk. I am a very old man, age 86. What I wish to share with you is not the wisdom of an elder. Instead I am giving a fairly reliable recollection of an historic event critical to this place and critical to its transformation over the past years.

Mary Lou and I came to Coeur d'Alene out of law school in 1955. In 1963, I moved into what is now the Bank of America building. I have since that time had the total view of McEuen Field and Tubbs Hill from my office window. What has happened and what has not happened in those places has been a matter close to my heart. Hear me out about the first occurrence after we came here.

Let me take you back to 1956. For most of you present, this would be before you were born. In 1956 all of what you are now seeing was nothing.

The land had been purchased in 1936 for \$19,000 with the intent to construct an electric power plant to provide municipal power to the city of Coeur d'Alene. With a change in mayor in the 1937 election and with the solid opposition of Washington Water Power, the proposed plan for the power plant never proceeded.

During World War II with a booming Farragut Naval Station, a housing project was built upon this property for workers and families who were coming to the area. After the end of the war and Farragut was closed, the housing project was demolished in about 1946. For the next ten years the land was vacant used occasionally for a county fairgrounds, for visiting circuses and other one time open air events.

In 1956, downtown was dormant. Business was slow. About a quarter of the stores on Sherman Avenue were vacant. The mines in Silver Valley were subject to strikes. The lumber market was depressed.

Tourist business was more or less totally summer time. This was long before the construction of Templin's Northshore and certainly even longer before the creation of Hagadone's Coeur d'Alene Resort.

In 1956 there was not much to save. The east half and most of the shoreline of Tubbs Hill was owned by the Idaho Water Company. The city only had a peninsula on the southwest point of Tubbs Hill.

On Mullan Field, as it was named, there was nothing of significance. The field was a dusty place in the summer and muddy in the winter and used to park cars for downtown shopping and employees. The rest of it was vacant land with no particular development of any kind for the benefit of the city.

The downtown business people spent a couple of years coming up with a plan to give local economy a dramatic stimulus. The plan was to buy part of the flat land and construct a shopping mall. Shopping malls were the hottest thing in retail in the post war decade.

These downtown businessmen were not greedy developers trying to steal public land for unscrupulous reasons. They sincerely believed commercializing this long vacant land would be in the best interests of Coeur d'Alene.

On May 21, 1956 there was presented to the city council a proposal from downtown business men who included Carter Crimp, father of Sandy Bloem, Royal Shields owner of Coeur d'Alene Creamery and Bob Templin. They had formed an organization called Coeur d'Alene Plaza, Inc. The offer was to purchase property for \$100,000 and pave the parking lot.

At the public hearing there was general support but some opposition most cogently from Art Manley who saw a far distant and better public use. Art, then a bookkeeper for Shields Creamery, was an agitated environmentalist when that term was barely known. With a split vote, the council approved the proposal.

At that time Idaho state law required that sale of substantial public land be approved by a popular vote. The council set July 31, 1956 for a public vote. The land to be purchased was 4.6 acres extending from Front Street to the base of Tubbs Hill and from Second Street east to about Sixth

Street. This would include the boat ramp, the shore line and the first ball fields.

Led by Art, opponents created the "Lakeshore Development Committee" headed by Orrin Lee, father of Deanna Goodlander. The committee included May McEuen, who with her husband Virgil owned the grocery store on Sherman Avenue now known as Peterson's, Ray Kindler, county surveyor, Carl Gridley, downtown merchant, state employee Ed Johnson and me. Today only Ed and I are still around.

City Recreation Director Red Halpern made his office a place for us to plan our "Vote No" campaign. We all came to share Art's vision of future use superior to a shopping mall.

It was a tough campaign, but we won by a vote of yes 945; no 2,082, a 69% margin of success.

With the help of civic groups and matching federal grants and aggressive planning of Red Halpern, ball fields, tennis and basketball courts and a small playground were completed in the next 20 years.

Our committees only contribution was only an eight foot Norwegian Spruce Tree donated by Ray Kindler that grew into the Freedom Tree.

About three years ago Mayor Bloem and the city council appointed what became known as the McEuen Team. The assigned goal was for public development that would greatly increase use of the property. The instructions were interpreted by the McEuen Team as "To Dream". I interpret this as to be visionary.

The McEuen Team carried out the vision for what you see around you. Dell Hatch, Doug Eastwood and Bill Greenwood have guided the way. What Sandy Emerson has helped me see out my window has been the steady, timely and difficult work being done in a remarkably efficient way by Dean Hagenson and his Contractors Northwest.

Since the first public disclosure of what was planned by the McEuen Team there have been controversies. For me these controversies have been like clouds covering a high mountain peak. The McEuen Team came forward with a many faceted plan. People opposed for a variety of reasons

would raise a public outcry that would cloud the plan. On several occasions the attempted recall – the 2013 city election - seemed like the clouds obscuring what could happen.

This time an election that said “yes” the McEuen Team plan is done. There is a blue sky with a clear view of all that is around us. The “dream”, the “vision”, is now reality.

Public attendance has exceeded all expectations and will continue to do so. At the first opening of this area last month, the children’s playgrounds were jammed. Kevin, who is the maintenance man in our building, told me he had taken his six year old granddaughter to the playground upon its opening, spent four hours with her and then when he started to leave his granddaughter began crying because she was having so much fun and didn’t want to leave.

The message here is that those who still oppose the idea of McEuen Park are going to lose any argument that they may have with a six year old girl. To complete my analogy you are surrounded by the Everest of a modern city park with a full view and the opportunity to use this entire area. The vision of Art Manley, May McEuen and the rest of us followed up forty eight years later has far exceeded our greatest expectations.

Thank you all for making McEuen Park happen.

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