

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 17-23, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 27



Have faith, Seaside, the next is yet to come,
Campus Town which, from this spot, was done ...



Photos courtesy City of Seaside

AFTER 25 YEARS, IS CAMPUS TOWN REALLY COMING TO SEASIDE?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

APPEARING more like an empty Easter tomb than city council chamber, the photo beneath Campus Town reveals the site of Seaside's history-changing vote at Oldemeyer Center on March 19. If you could choose one of these titles, which would it be: "*Covid-19 Meets Racism*" or "*The Seaside Resurrection*"?

Here's the scoop:

Seaside City Council unanimously finalized approval of Campus Town at its second reading on Thursday, March 19 after members of the black community nearly turned the public hearing two weeks earlier into a political blunder.

I was at that March 5 meeting.

What a night!

Rubbing Noses With Coronavirus

The March 5 Seaside City Council meeting was like a tent revival. More than 170 people—homeless, sheltered and in between--crammed every aisle, bench, and doorway of council chambers.

Overflow crowds filled hallway chairs, sofas, and tables.

We probably rubbed noses with Coronavirus, but no one was yet aware of such a threat.

The meeting opened at 7 p.m. with a prayer and a flag salute. The action started amicably.

Men in suits approached the podium along with lay gents in jeans, sport shirts, motorcycle jackets and suit pants with tee shirts.

Speakers were given three minutes to speak for or against Campus Town, the development of Seaside's land adjacent to California State University at Monterey Bay that had been more than 25 years in coming. After the People were heard, City Council would vote for or against the project as proposed.

At least three black ministers in suits and one white man in suspenders and jogging shoes offered prayers.

Two or three white men in suits, with legal briefcases, tried to sidetrack K. B. Bakewell's Campus Town project by arguing reasons to revise it.

Housing For All?

Women in bright head wrappings, fancy hats, ropes of jewels, eye pastels, leather boots, shawls and tee-shirts emblazoned with "We love Campus Towne" fronts and "Seasiders4Seaside" backs stood out like a cheerleading squad.

Many said they sat with Bakewell in charettes and helped plan their own community atop the hill where derelict barracks had sat decaying since Fort Ord's closure in 1994.

Pitches for council's pro votes included: The homeless, poor families, underpaid teachers can afford to live at Campus Town. Campus Town will be built by local workers. Teachers can afford to teach here, and young families can afford to remain here.

Things Get Heated

Regina Mason, prominent Seaside native and former candidate for city council, changed the theme from all-inclusive community to politics and power.

"I am a descendant of a military family..." she said, "here to call out white supremacy that is happening as outsiders move in and take over..."

She said she'll run again, following which several speakers threatened to have officials at the dais recalled or voted from office.

"Some of our grandparents came here aboard slave ships!" someone called.

Shouts included, "We don't want outsiders coming in and taking over."

"This is our city."

“It’s all of us or none of us.”

“A woman grew militant. “I want our community to move forward. If you can’t speak up, I will!”

Suddenly Rev. Kenneth Raye Murray of Ocean View Baptist Church reminded the crowd, “This... tonight... is just the beginning. . .”

Pastor Harold Lusk of Bethel Community Baptist Church was already preaching when his shoes hit the floor. “I say, ask God to give them the direction to do what’s best. If we keep fighting, we’re not going to help nobody. . . Amen.”

After brief discussions, city council voted 5-0 for Campus Town. Wild cheers broke out.

During the next two weeks, Covid-19 forced people to stay home, sit 6-10 feet apart, and refrain from being in groups larger than 10.

Thus, the second reading to decide Campus Town’s fate was done in the tomblike Oldemeyer Center. With no public input, council’s unanimous aye decision was based on the case’s merits.

Seaside’s resurrection as the peninsula’s city on the hill will commence after the sunset of Fort Ord Reuse Authority in June when, if people can’t yet meet in person, they can watch council meetings on Zoom.

Meanwhile, during my recovery quarantine, I’m reflecting on the night Covid-19 met Racism and realize Seaside’s most-populous community, Latinx, was notable by its absence.

Campus Town details at <https://www.ci.seaside.ca.us/632/Campus-Town-Project>

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Contact Wanda Sue Parrott, 831-899-5887, amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com

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