

# WHAT IN THE WORLD ?!?

Humboldt county recently held a "workshop" to shop around some concepts for improving the main drag of the unincorporated town of Garberville, in part, to be in compliance with **The Complete Streets Act of 2008** (AB 1358) which requires California cities and counties to adopt transportation plans that accommodate all users of roadways, including pedestrians, transit, bicyclists, the elderly, children, motorists, and the disabled.

All good and well, from reports of the meeting. It seemed that the presenting project coordinator of the civil engineering firm hired to work this stuff out had visited sometime last winter to assess the business strip in question, and was surprised by the vitality of our little hub of civilization. The meeting was held to solicit input, the county's on-line survey got a mere 15 responses, mostly favorable, but with some concern expressed over a few of the details floated. Funding for the planning got the process this far, but stopped short of any actual timeline for implementation, pending the **identification of required funding sources**. At least the State requirements have been met with the planning process underway.

The goals beyond safe and efficient travel and parking seem to include being welcoming to visitors, which folds well into the motives of creating an increased tourist draw in the Southern Humboldt area -- to recover from the blows to the local post-legalization economy. The design concept presented relies on inspirations from "complete street projects" in three incorporated cities with considerably larger commercial centers. The thing is, you need more than pedestrians and parking to make a place desirable. Perhaps it was lost on the visiting presenter, but as she describes it, the *"really vibrant, progressive community, [where] there is a lot of activity. There is a lot of hustle and bustle; a lot of people moving about the space, a lot of cars, a ton of cars, and a lot of [people] parking."* This is because the small town serves a large outlying area. This far flung community has a lot going on, some of it in town, but not a very cohesive public planning concept, or welcoming public face. County bureaucracy is once again mostly ham-handed in their attempts to be inclusive, rounding up the usual stakeholders.

There is some irony that the county is prioritizing the quaint malling of a street, for the most part just an avenue between essential services and a few surviving boutique business. Failing to address the repair of catastrophic failures of the essential two lane arteries that serve large populations to both the east and west of town. By normalizing stop signs on the remaining single lanes -- while growing pot holes become a potential new hazard at every turn.

Down 101, south of the county line, in my hamlet, CALTRANS in their infinite wisdom (no doubt trying to use up the funds at the end of the fiscal year) saw fit to expend a ton of effort, equipment and materiel to pave a mile of highway. The slow lane on a section that is five lanes wide! And it's connecting on and off ramps ... grinding out the old asphalt. I wish I could remember how bad it had been, but can't say that it was. I do remember that the ramps in question must have been resurfaced within the last decade. This expenditure in a place that is home to a scant few neighborhoods is truly a misplaced priority, as usual.

Garberville hardly qualifies as a tourist destination, though it may be the gateway to an adventure in nature, it is a merely a pit stop for most -- gas, groceries, and motel rooms for weary travelers, a restaurant if your timing is right and you can afford it. Not long ago, a long established co-op gallery of local art collapsed. For a brief period there were actually two used bookstores, before that, a new bookstore was a longtime vibrant asset, there was a record store, antique stores. There was a period when the ice cream shop arcade was abuzz, decades of movies were shown. There was even several small independent grocers. Garberville had its own liquor store, and even more gas stations with actual repair garages! All amenities that serve both locals and visitors. All gone now. Now too many small retail shops stand empty. There is a blight zone of defunct businesses brought on by mold issues. Who knows? maybe exacerbated by the under ground creeks that flow through town, maybe daylighting a creek could be part of the plan? **Travel through town with the eyes of a stranger and ask yourself does it say desirable destination?**

I guess we should consider ourselves lucky that the post office and the car parts store still are there for us ... and that a mid-size regional grocery chain has blessed us with two opportunities to spend too much on food.

The business environment, the retail opportunities, the small business class that make a town a place to be are not part of the revitalization of main street envisioned. That's not really a county issue, though some aggressively eager developers have conceptual plans underway. This could be summed up as: **Build it and they will come** -- and presumably spend money on tasteful dining and drinking that will make all the investment worthwhile. Because that is what it is all about after all. The trickle-down of low-wage service industry jobs to cater to the need of tourists is not a very admirable model of development. **Is it really the best we can do?**

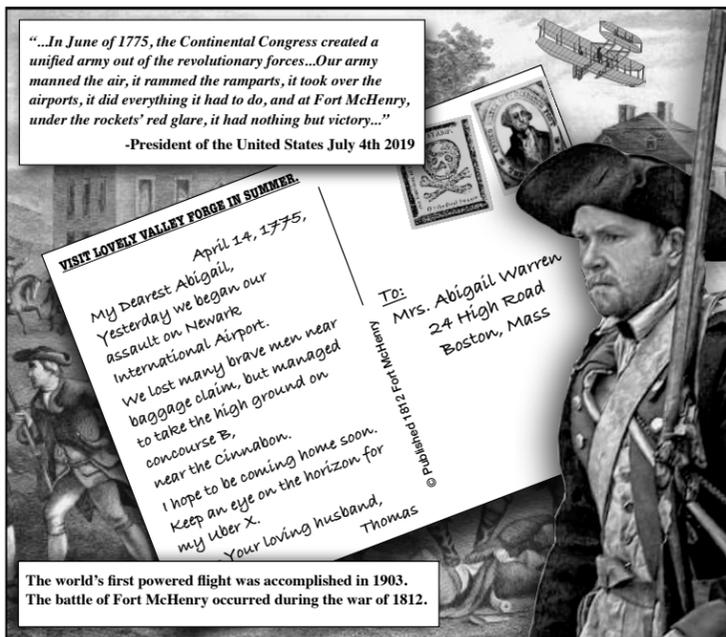
Meanwhile county wide, housing availability and affordability can't keep up with demand. The lottery of timing that enabled residency here has gone through a lot of phases. The Homestead Act of 1862, signed into law by Abraham Lincoln. This allowed anyone who was a U.S. citizen (at least 21 years old, the head of a household, including single women and former slaves) to stake a claim on 160 acres at \$1.25 per acre. An online inflation calculator tells me that the purchasing power of 1862 dollars in todays money is just over \$25, so that was a pretty good deal -- and the rush was on, though you did have to have the \$4,057 (2019 value) for 160 acres. **Classism was baked into the mix**. Then came gentrification 1.0, as ranch and timber land was carved up into affordable slices for the swarms of hopeful rural dwellers dreaming of a life with nature. Then the boom boom years that saw properties juggled left and right as investment and laundering ill-gotten gains, from carpet bagging millionaire junk bond moguls to Nouveau Riche growers. Not lucky enough to get in at the beginning? Often that means: **You ought to move on stranger** ... That attitude hardened into the game plan of Garberville Business in the previous decade, as the new class of dispossessed travelers explored the world, and the un-washed, washed up here, the fabled mecca of "Killer Bud."

The County Civil Grand Jury has issued a report that recommends the **Housing First** model already long recommended by local homeless advocates and paid consultants. So, then? ....

It is already three years since a housing emergency was declared in the county, a move that theoretically allows a waiver of prohibitive regulations in favor of doing what needs doing -- you know, like an emergency! For a while there was a "safe camp" area set up in Eureka. Nobody really wants that to be happening in their town. Maybe some incentive from the county could encourage willing citizens to create opportunities in better settings.

Here's another irony: after the highway pushed through the untamed north coast, buses brought tourists north from the city for vacations. Car camps were provided by municipalities, riverside resorts and camps hosted families in tents and tiny cabins. Entertainment was provided by walking trails, horse back riding, swimming and affordable lodging in rustic settings -- just the sort of thing both houseless people and tourists could use more of.

**Joshua Golden**



"I pledge allegiance to the soil  
one ecosystem  
in diversity  
under the sun  
with joyful interpenetration for all."  
- Gary Snyder

## SUMMER OF LOVE: OKRA COME HOME

Our Summer of Love begins as it has in the past with an act of armed terrorism. A notable street person, Okra has been driven out of Southern Humboldt by 4 men with guns who hunted him down at his campsite the day after he appeared on the KMUD morning show. This is what he told a Greenfuse staffer in a place **not** Southern Humboldt. His attackers knew he was part of an *establishment* of sorts, defenders of the poor and the vulnerable. The sincerity of the gun, they hoped, spoke louder than any hippy "truth-telling".

Okra come home and help us continue to respond to hate with love. We need to infest our communities without pity with a contagious compassion, and to resist the persistent abuse that has become a default position has soon as our patience is tested. We need to look deep before we shoot from the hip. Don't care is not an option.

From Okra's 1990 collection:

### Evening Prayer

*Last light*

*Miracle of night,*

*Sealed in,*

*We grope the walls for tiny cracks.*

*There must be a way out.*

*Opaque eyes open across the horizon.*

*We can make own sky,*

*And re-create the sun,*

*In our own image & of coarse*

*Much more useful.*

*Liquid warmth, rising from the tiles*

*Opened windows and the delirious summer.*

*Is it safe out there?*

With a naked face  
i go out amongst people  
in elaborate masks.



Flesh to bone to earth,  
We are all becoming soil,  
Eyes into flowers.

These silent rocks speak  
of fire and flood We are shaped  
by the earth's forces.

- Grace Woods



*"The degree of civilization in a society  
can be judged by entering its prisons."*

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY



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All contributions go to printing and distribution

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