



Not fooling anyone

A lie by omission is still a lie. And fixing a boondoggle of the city's own making and expecting accolades from residents who have seen city councils continually buy every fantasy project a developer lays out grates on our last collective nerve. Especially when we still don't have basic recreational amenities, like a modern aquatic center for our kids, that much smaller Nevada cities like Carson City and Minden/Gardnerville have had for decades.

The latest effort to mislead us involves plans for a 20-story non-gambling hotel, or as CAI Investments calls it, an "upper upscale" hotel, on Court Street next to the historic Trinity Episcopal Church. The multi-use project will also feature 40 luxury condominiums and office space.

Just before the plans were announced, the Reno City Council changed an ordinance that had prohibited new high-rises from casting shade on parks and plazas to avoid causing

ice and discomfort by removing the winter sunlight. The developer said the ordinance change had nothing to do with his project. Right. Please don't insult our intelligence.

One planning commissioner told the Reno Gazette Journal he voted for the change only after being told by city staff "it was purely a zoning matter and there were no project applications for the site." Uh huh. One reason CAI Investments needed to get their application in by the end of 2019 was to take advantage of the building site being in an infamous Opportunity Zone, providing a 15 percent break on federal taxes. If the application were filed in 2020, that tax break would be reduced to 10 percent.

The developer boasted to the newspaper about his offer of \$200,000 and parking spaces on Sunday for Trinity's congregation but left out the reasons why the church rejected the offer. Reverend William Stomski noted it "was also contingent on Trinity's agreement to not

protest the special use permit now or in perpetuity, or any other variances that may be imposed by City Council at any time." It's no wonder the church and its members decided it wasn't in their best interest to accept such generosity tainted by requirements to stifle their voices.

And forgive us for failing to embrace yet another downtown "revitalization." This one is led by developer P3 Partners who pitched their newest and greatest idea to the council in December. They want to build a non-gambling hotel and "upgrade" the significantly underperforming National Bowling Stadium and Reno Events Center. If you lived here in 1995, you'll remember the promises from our city council that Reno would get back every penny from its multi-million-dollar investment. Instead, they left us with a legacy of debt.

But P3 will fix all that! They'll just need half of the room tax surcharge for two years, about \$1.7 million, and another \$1.8 million a year in subsidies

from the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Center for the next four years. They might even add a multifamily residential project at the top of the property. But do we really believe they'll dedicate penthouse views towards the affordable housing our city desperately needs?

Yes, their plans are better than letting the poorly designed facilities sit vacant, dragging down the city budget year after year. They have lots of big ideas, but who knows how many will blossom once the project fully "pencils out." It's not like Reno has never been burned by overly optimistic developers who promise the moon, if only we'll fork over the check. Remember, that's how we ended up with these white elephants in the first place.

Mayor Schieve noted, apparently without irony, that she wanted to review the proposed deal carefully since, "A lot of times, unfortunately, our city gets taken advantage of." No kidding. □

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