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Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Downtown plan master stroke for future

A year ago, we asked this question: Shouldn't the establishment of a vision for downtown Owensboro be the foremost task facing this community, considering that a massively expensive riverfront development project was being planned? We also asked whether that vision or plan was the responsibility of a development manager, some other local entity or the product of a consulting firm that specializes in main street renovation projects.

Eight months ago, we got our answer when the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corp. and the Downtown Development Authority announced that an effort was under way to bring in a team of professional planners to create a comprehensive downtown master plan and feasibility study for downtown retail, entertainment and residential development.

We endorsed the selection of Gateway Planning Group Inc. of Fort Worth, Texas, and Michael Huston, an architect and urban designer with Wallace Roberts & Todd of Coral Gables, Fla., to create the plan. We noted that what had been lacking for three decades was a real plan to finally revitalize downtown and build on the good things that have been happening there with the RiverPark Center, the International Bluegrass Music Museum, the refurbishing of some historic buildings and the success of summer concerts and festivals.

A master plan was needed to provide a common vision for what downtown should be, easily supportable by all stakeholders, including local government and the business and investment sectors.

It needed, above all, to be a grand vision, enough to spark the imagination, create buzz and

engender enthusiasm.

To say that we are pleased with the recently revealed master plan understates it. It is a doozy of a plan, one that we can heartily endorse. Who wouldn't want to live in a community that had something like that? The "market square plaza" with its stalls, cafe seating and retail sales kiosks, connecting the Second Street to the riverfront is the centerpiece and perfectly suited for a farmers' market, festivals and countless other events.

A 225-room hotel and indoor events center will open to the market square plaza and the riverfront. Second Street will once again be the city's main street while East Second will be the cultural and arts district. Veterans Boulevard will be primarily for pedestrian use connecting the RiverPark Center to McConnell Plaza, lined on its south side by multi-story mixed use buildings featuring retail and

restaurant uses on the ground floors.

The price tag for the six components of the core downtown plan is \$79.5 million. Economist John Hockenyo, who is working with Gateway on the project, said the city of Owensboro and Daviess Fiscal Court have enough borrowing capacity to pay for \$25 million of the plan's cost, leaving almost \$55 million that would need to be paid for by raising city and county occupational tax rates by 0.3 percent or by raising insurance premium tax rates to 7.5 percent.

The question then becomes, will this community step up and do the hard things to make this happen in terms of taxes and borrowing money? In other words, is this community willing to invest in itself to create a vibrant downtown that will spur economic development through tourism, private investment and heightened quality of life for local

residents?

We hope the answer is yes.

It is encouraging that city and county elected officials are already lining up to support the project. We also hope the high cost of the project does not encourage a piece-meal approach. As bold as this plan is, it needs bold execution and that means doing it all to capture all its potential.

It will soon be 31 years since the face of downtown Owensboro changed forever with the departure of most of its retail stores. Throughout those three decades downtown Owensboro has struggled to recapture a remnant of the energy it once had, with varying success. Now the opportunity exists as never before to make downtown and the riverfront a stunning venue and a magnetic destination for visitors and residents alike.

It is an opportunity this community simply cannot afford to reject.

READERS WRITE

TV print too small

In response to Tammy Vernon's Nov. 11 and Michael Ray's Nov. 5 letters regarding TV listings: I agree with both of them. I have another point of view. We the elderly have a hard time reading this small print. The old guide showed listings until 2 a.m. and on sleepless night this was a plus and I imagine second-shift workers relied on it.

Mary Medley
 Owensboro

Only in America could a black man rise so high

Not long ago blacks were working in cotton fields, working behind a plow and later at low paying jobs.

Now we have a black man with an Army, Navy, Air Force and the keys to Fort Knox.

Only In America.

Joe Newton
 Owensboro

Palin's political future all but evaporated

Sarah Palin should have run up the white flag of surrender and kept the clothes. They were gorgeous, and there really was no reason to give up the \$150,000 wardrobe unless she planned to run again under the Walmart Mom persona. Surely she knows that's over.

Many Republicans were understandably irked by this use of their campaign contributions. For others, the only complaint was the hypocrisy factor — the "anti-elitist" cleaning out the designer racks at Saks and Neiman Marcus.

Far more problematical were the personal expenses Palin charged to Alaska taxpayers. A standout example was the four glamorous nights she and her daughter spent at a \$707-a-day New York hotel — all justified by the governor's attendance at a five-hour conference.

We all know the angst of seeing state officials living high on the public hog.

For many of us, the night terror of Palin being second in line to become president is gone. We can think straight again. And so can Republican leaders.

Nearly all the Sunday talk show hosts asked their Republican guests a what-was-the-party-thinking question on the pick of Palin as vice presidential candidate. They gallantly withheld overt criticism but offered enough faint praise to sink any of her lingering ambitions for 2012.

So what is next for Palin? She's clearly got native smarts, but not the intellectual heft required to hold high office.

The depth of that deficit became clear in the "reports" of a John McCain adviser complaining that she didn't know Africa was a continent. Though obviously no Palin fan, even I question such an extraordinary charge, especially attached to unnamed sources.

Whether or not the story is true — and Palin says it is not — the

takeaway point is this: So low is confidence in Palin's knowledge base that huge audiences are ready to

believe that she didn't know Africa was a continent. Not-so-liberal Fox News stands by its the story.

The sands of the egg timer seem to be running out on Palin's moment as a serious national political figure. Even in Alaska, the stars no longer line up in her favor.

Palin returns home at a time when falling oil prices have crimped any petro-state executive's ability to spread the wealth and take credit for it. She and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez have that in

common.

Her divisive remarks during the campaign caused Democrats in Anchorage to doubt the sincerity of her seeming bipartisan approach to governing. They will be less docile.

Face it: Palin has a snowball's chance in Hawaii of recouping her formerly high approval ratings in Alaska.

Her hope of staying in the big game was to become a U.S. senator. The preferred path would have been through Alaska's Sen. Ted Stevens' downfall. Recently convicted of seven felonies, Stevens was to win re-election, then get thrown out of the Senate. Palin would call a special election to fill his seat and run in it. That was the plan, which has since gone awry.

The recount is finished and Stevens was defeated by his Democratic challenger, Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich.

While Palin's political prospects seem increasingly constrained, she has a cloudless future as an incendiary TV talk show host. She's got it all: looks, charisma, a sharp speaking style and an impassioned following.

For all her bashing of the East Coast and the media, Palin clearly loves being there and talking to them. Good use for a \$5,000 Valentino jacket, alas.



Froma Harrop
 Providence (R.I.) Journal



Religious conservatives sinking GOP

As Republicans sort out the reasons for their defeat, they likely will overlook or dismiss the gorilla in the pulpit.

Three little letters, great big problem: G-O-D.

I'm bathing in holy water as I type.

To be more specific, the evangelical, right-wing, boogedy-boogedy branch of the GOP is what ails the erstwhile conservative party and will continue to afflict and marginalize its constituents if reckoning doesn't soon cometh.

Simply put: Armband religion is killing the Republican Party. And, the truth — as long as we're setting ourselves free — is that if one were to eavesdrop on private conversations among the party intelligentsia, one would hear precisely that.

The choir has become absurdly off-key, and many Republicans know it. But they need those votes!

So it has been for the Grand Old Party since the 1980s or so, as it has become increasingly beholden to an element that used to be relegated to wooden crates on street corners.

Short break as writer ties blindfold and smokes her last cigarette.

Which is to say, the GOP has surrendered its high ground to its lowest brows. In the process, the party has alienated its non-base constituents, including other people of faith (those who prefer a more private approach to

worship), as well as secularists and conservative-leaning Democrats who otherwise might be tempted to cross the aisle.

Here's the deal, 'pobbies: Howard Dean was right.

It isn't that culture doesn't matter. It does. But preaching to the choir produces no converts. And shifting demographics suggest that the Republican Party — and conservatism with it — eventually will die out unless religion is returned to the privacy of one's heart where it belongs.

Religious conservatives become defensive at any suggestion that they've had something to do with the GOP's erosion. And, though the recent Democratic sweep can be attributed in large part to a referendum on President Bush and the failing economy, three long-term trends identified by Emory University's Alan Abramowitz have been devastating to the Republican Party: increasing racial diversity, declining marriage rates and changes in religious beliefs.

Suffice it to say, the Republican Party is largely comprised of white, married Christians. Anyone watching the two conventions last summer can't have missed the stark differences: One party was brimming with energy, youth and diversity; the other felt like an annual Depends sales meeting.

With the exception of Miss Alaska, of course.

Even Sarah Palin has blamed Bush

policies for the GOP loss. She's not entirely wrong, but she's also part of the problem. Her recent conjecture about whether to run for president in 2012 (does anyone really doubt she will?) speaks for itself.

"I'm like, OK, God, if there is an open door for me somewhere, this is what I always pray, I'm like, don't let me miss the open door. Show me where the open door is. ... And if there is an open door in (20)12 or four years later, and if it's something that is going to be good for my family, for my state, for my nation, an opportunity for me, then I'll plow through that door."

Let's do pray that God shows Alaska's governor the door.

Meanwhile, it isn't necessary to evict the Creator from the public square, surrender Judeo-Christian values or diminish the value of faith in America. Belief in something greater than oneself has much to recommend it, including most of the world's architectural treasures, our universities and even our founding documents.

But, like it or not, we are a diverse nation, no longer predominantly white and Christian.

Among Jewish voters, 78 percent went for Obama. Sixty-six percent of under-30 voters did likewise. Forty-five percent of voters ages 18-29 are Democrats compared to just 26 percent Republican; in 2000, party affiliation was split almost evenly.

Given those facts, the future of the GOP looks dim and dimmer if it stays the present course. Either the Republican Party needs a new base — or the nation may need a new party.



Kathleen Parker
 Washington Post Writers Group

The Opinion page featured commentary lineup

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Ellen Goodman Thomas Sowell	David Broder Kathleen Parker	Leonard Pitts Jr. Larry Dale Keeling	Paul Greenberg Board of Contributors	Froma Harrop Kathleen Parker	Leonard Pitts Jr. Garrison Keillor	Robert Samuelson Cal Thomas



Coming Friday

Garrison Keillor says the secret to happiness is shoveling snow, and being careful to rake the leaves.