

Asheville trades its soul for steel

Every day developers clear cut another small forest, put up 10 metal beams at some construction site, close off another street downtown and present another 13-story condominium unit to the Asheville City Council.

Those sure seem like signs of a growing town.

Well, yes and no.

It is hard to deny that Asheville is certainly growing, but whether or not any of this new construction is actually useful or practical for Asheville's citizens is up for debate.

By focusing on new development, the city delays work on other, years-old projects still unfinished

In case anyone has not noticed, the road work choking the downtown city streets has not improved traffic or the quality of the streets, and the Pack Square Park construction that began nearly four years ago continues with no end in sight. Dirt fills the old fountain and the Vance monument is inaccessible. Beyond that, though, there is no observable progress at the site.

Recently, the Asheville Downtown Association said construction is moving so slowly that downtown businesses volunteered to help build the park. That is pretty bad when regular citizens feel they need to volunteer in order to finish construction on what amounts to a 6.5-acre glorified backyard.

Asheville's itch to change has run into problems with the Pack Square Park issue. On the other hand, Biltmore Village in South Asheville is having relative success with their improvements.

Last summer, a new addition to Biltmore Village opened and now Asheville is home to such stores as J. Crew, Williams-



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Sonoma, Coldwater Creek and White House/Black Market. While they may be lovely stores, they cater to the residents of Biltmore Forest and the wealthy tourists and not to the general population here in Asheville.

In addition to the new stores, there is also a new hotel under construction in another part of Biltmore Village. The Grand Bohemian Hotel, slated to open in April, looks as though it may actually open on its targeted date. The Web site describes the hotel as: "Just steps away from gates of the famous Biltmore Estate lies the authentic Old-World, rustic ambiance of this Tudor inspired boutique hotel..."

Sounds fancy, and it is. What they fail to mention is that while they charge \$200+ per night (for the standard room), the views will be a bit more Motel 6. McDonald's sits across the street from the hotel. Directly next to it is a Hardee's. Behind it is a road with railroad tracks that leads to a City Stop gas station and a Long John Silver's/A&W combination restaurant.

Construction moves along at an expeditious pace in other parts of Asheville.

The Residences at 151 and the Hotel

Indigo, a boutique hotel chain, both open next year. On top of the Indigo will be The Residences which consist of 12 condominium units that occupy the top four floors.

The condominiums will be very expensive, as will the hotel. The Web site for the Residences states, "In Art in nature and in Zen there is simple beauty. In Asheville, there is your Residence." While the building may be beautiful, much like the situation with the Grand Bohemian Hotel, the location is not ideal.

Guests and residents alike will enjoy beautiful views of downtown Asheville

set against a backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains, if they happen to be on the good side. The other three sides offers folks a view of Three Brothers Restaurant, The Salvation Army, the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office and Interstate 240.

Asheville is not Aspen, Colo. Asheville is Asheville and the

people who live here know that and the people they expect to move here will figure it out rather quickly.

The city built its reputation as the folksy, little liberal city in the sea of "red" that is much of Western North Carolina. Right now, Asheville is experiencing an identity crisis. The city needs to think about where and what they want to build and if it makes sense for the city.

Three-quarters of Asheville (north, east and west) is full of affordable shopping, popular and award winning restau-

rants, funky art and sculptures and beautiful Art Deco architecture. It's silly to base the city's future development on the one-quarter of the city that is home to the wealthiest citizens and the wealthiest tourists. Catering to a few wealthy people and ignoring the general populace of the town is not in the best interests of Asheville's 71,000 citizens.

The economy remains in shambles and many people can't pay a couple million dollars for a condo. Investing in the belief that people will pay for those condos is riskier than fixing the old, decrepit Asheville Civic Center, opening a new club or restaurant downtown or even constructing a large music venue in order to lure popular touring acts to town. All of those things would bring money to Asheville, perhaps more than a new and expensive high-rise might.

The majority of the people that can afford the Grand Bohemian, The Residences, the new Biltmore Village shops and the \$3 million condos that City Council is discussing plans for are the same people who will no longer come to Asheville when the last patch of tree-covered mountain is razed for more senseless, overpriced and poorly thought out development.

The people living and working in Asheville will still be here. The city should think about their needs rather than tourists or retirees, who contribute little to the city's future.

It is not just expensive hotels and restaurants that people come to Asheville for; it is also the natural beauty and the off-beat, artistic vibe reverberating through downtown, West Asheville and the River Arts District. Forgetting that fact might be this city's downfall.

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Blink

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success.

The hit "All the Small Things" off their album *Enema of the State* reached out to a diverse group, from rebellious high school kids to their mainstream-rock-listening parents. The video poked fun at '90s boy-band antics, establishing Blink not only as talented rockers, but as goofballs intent on having fun.

The group continued cranking out hits and laughs, soon becoming renowned for dirty jokes and immaturity. No topic was taboo.

They drew in thousands of devoted fans, revamping the pop-punk subculture of the '90s. Blink's unruly coming-of-age anthems fueled a generation approaching the new millennium.

You didn't grow out of Blink. They grew with you.

Tom Delonge acrimoniously split with Travis Barker and Hoppus in 2005. Delonge barely spoke to his former bandmates during the hiatus, instead focusing on his new band Angels and Airwaves. Hoppus and Barker channeled their creative energy into +44.


Both post-Blink bands experienced success reached Blink-182's acclaim or influence.

After drummer Barker's near-fatal airplane crash last year, the former bandmates realized life was too short and quickly mended their friendship.

Skeptics, including a few of my friends who still consider themselves Blink fans, think these guys are just cranking out a new record and going on some half-hearted reunion tour to fund glamorous rock star lives. But I can't help but find the reunion inspiring.

Watching friends reunite and anticipating the creative energy sure to ensue absolutely thrills me.

I'm not ashamed to be among those eternally stoked about the reunion.



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