

OPERATION

“4” SIGHT

Camas, Washington

Prepared by:
Chamber of Commerce
Commercial Problems Committee

WE KNEW WE HAD A PROBLEM-----

Camas, Washington, is a city of about 6000 located in the eastern part of Clark County, in the greater Portland metropolitan area. Like other cities which "just grew" from pioneer days, without real planning, Camas has a business district centered on one main street in a few blocks "downtown".

At one time, this was sufficient. There was room. There were no parking problems. There were no super highways to take potential customers to the larger cities. There were no surrounding shopping centers advertising: "Come out here. Plenty of free parking."

We knew we had to do something - but what. What could we do to N.E. Fourth Avenue - our "downtown" - to make it more attractive, to retain our old customers and bring in new.

We began with a "trade survey" in which questionnaires were sent to families in Camas, Washougal (a neighboring smaller city) and the rural routes. A return postage-paid envelope was enclosed with the questionnaire.

We sent out 3,470 questionnaires. Some 894 were filled out by residents and returned. This was a 26 per cent return, more than adequate for an accurate estimation of public opinion.

Our key question: "Which of the following changes would be most apt to cause you to do more buying in downtown Camas?"

There were eight possible answers. More than 30 per cent wanted parking meters removed, 37 per cent wanted off-street parking, 15 per cent desired improved appearance of business buildings.

The answers made the Commercial Problems Committee of the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce begin to consider a whole new approach to the downtown shopping problem. What the people were asking for was a HUGE SHOPPING CENTER RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CITY.

WE LOOKED LONG AND HARD FOR ANSWERS-----

We first got the idea for a downtown shopping park in May, 1962, from an article in the Western Cities magazine. It told of Grand Junction, Colorado, which had a problem similar to Camas'. They solved theirs with an innovation on the shopping mall concept.

Dr. Thomas Williams, Camas dentist, went to Grand Junction. Dr. Williams, one of the active members of our seven-man Commercial Problems Committee, came back filled with enthusiasm - and ideas.

He found that Grand Junction had received national attention and an All-America City award for "Operation Foresight," locally designed and financed downtown development program. He found that Grand Junction had in 1962 rebuilt and enlarged water lines, sewers, curbs, streets, sidewalks, street lights and traffic signals on 24 block of streets and had created a four-block shopping park.

The shopping park was the key to Grand Junction's program. This plan was used to minimize the disadvantages of a complete mall by allowing traffic access and limited parking in the area. However the pedestrian was given priority.

Pedestrian safety, angle parking, trees, shrubbery and benches keyed the new look.

Faced with a deteriorating city core in which no major public improvements had been undertaken for 21 years, the city council in the Colorado city worded with the Chamber of Commerce there in bringing about the shopping park.

"Why," said the Camas businessmen, "can't we do the same thing?"

And thus was born Operation 4-Sight.

Phase One - Downtown Shopping Park

Phase Two - Off-street Parking

Phase Three - Beautification of Business Buildings

Phase Four - All-Weather Marquees.

SOLD OUR IDEA TO CITY HALL-----

So now we had an idea - a tentative plan. What would we do with it. The Chamber of Commerce has no legal or physical means of tearing up a street, planting trees, installing fountains.

First, we had to sell the city officials of Camas on the scheme. We had to convince them that the business district - and the whole city would benefit by modernization of four blocks of downtown Camas. We needed their help on Operation 4-Sight if it were to get off the ground.

The selling job was accomplished the same way business people make a sale of merchandise. We convinced the mayor and city council the shopping park was needed, should be accepted in competition with the hundreds of other types of city projects.

We attended city council meetings, staying after the regular meetings to talk with individual council members about our program. We showed slides that Dr. Williams had brought back from Grand Junction. We distributed literature on other types of shopping parks.

Most important, we did not go to the city council merely with a problem for them to solve. We did not go with palms extended for a municipal "handout."

We had a problem, true. But we also had a solution - the shopping park concept.

Members of the city council later expressed their gratitude for the work done by the Chamber of Commerce in helping solve their own business district problems.

And the city officials whole-heartedly agreed, for the good of the entire city, to join in Operation 4-Sight - a modern approach to an old problem.

TAKING OUR CASE TO THE PEOPLE-----

Trying to describe a shopping park, which no one in Camas had seen before, was a tough job. Words were inadequate. Maps were hard to understand.

To impress upon the citizens of Camas just what the proposed shopping park would look like - and to test the public's reaction - the Chamber of Commerce and the city decided to install a mock-up of the proposed improvement on one block of Northeast Fourth Avenue.

In March, 1965, city forces brought in concrete blocks, dirt, sawdust and rocks to build a realistic model of the proposed shopping park on Northeast Fourth Avenue between Birch and Cedar Streets. The Men's Garden Club was invited to help plant the trial park. Concrete blocks were placed to create temporary planting areas.

The city invested about \$1,000 to implement the test area. The Clark County PUD joined in the effort by installing special lighting. The five poles supporting overhead lighting for the one block area had special 1,000-watt "color oriented" lights installed.

Along with the mock-up, residents received explanations through the press that this was designed to test public reaction.

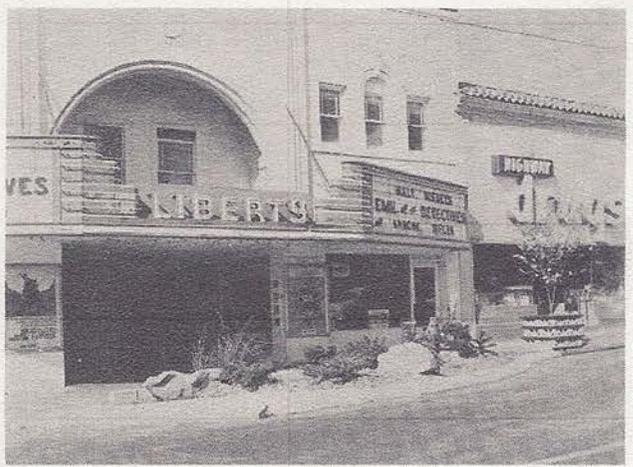
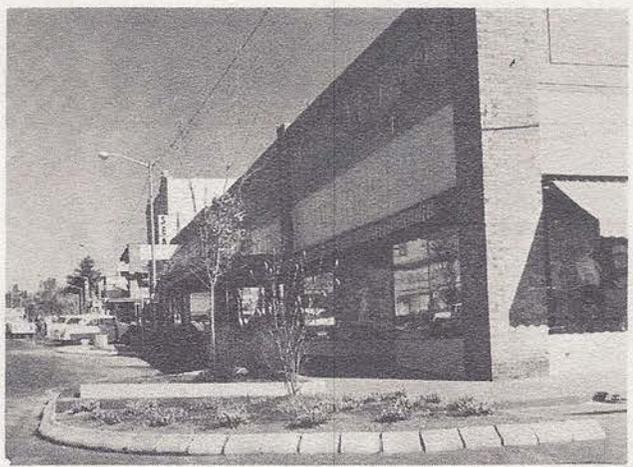
"If the public doesn't like it, we'll pull it out and use the materials to improve other city parks," said Mayor Willard Sampson. "There will be little loss in money spent if the mock-up shopping parks proves unpopular."

The mock-up was left in place for six weeks.

After the trial period, the mock-up was removed. Questionnaires were submitted to local residents. Citizens were asked if they liked the appearance and layout of the Downtown Shopping Park, whether it was convenient for shopping and if there were any suggestions for improvement.

Then the Chamber of Commerce waited for the public answer.

Preliminary Mock Up



OPERATION "4" SIGHT QUESTIONNAIRE

Your ideas will help the City of Camas, downtown merchants, and landowners in plans for improving the business district. Please answer the following questions, and bring or mail to the Chamber of Commerce office, 423 N.E. 4th, Camas, Washington.

1. Do you like the appearance and layout of the Downtown Shopping Park?
2. Does it offer convenience of parking and picking up merchandise?
3. Do you feel it should be extended for all 3 blocks on N.E. 4th?
4. Are there any suggestions for improving the plan?
5. What changes could improve the plan?
6. Are there other improvements you would prefer to see take place to improve shopping in downtown Camas?
7. Other comments:

All serious comments and suggestions will be considered and to do so we would appreciate your signing your name to this questionnaire. Thank you.

Name _____

Address _____

Note: a self address envelope was clipped to this questionnaire. The questionnaire was handed out to people on the street by a member of the Chamber staff.

And the answer came. Overwhelming support of the Chamber of Commerce plan to install a permanent shopping park in the downtown area of Camas.

By a more than 3 to 1 margin, those answering the questionnaire endorsed the basic shopping park concept.

Some suggested minor changes, such as one-way traffic, more or less parking, wider street areas, etc.

But the public wanted it. It was now up to the property owners along Northeast Fourth Avenue.

FIND THE BEST WAY TO PAY FOR IT-----

Realizing the need and desire for such a progressive facility as a shopping park is one thing. Finding the means to finance is something else.

However both Chamber members and city officials fell to the task and came up with a workable solution.

The businessmen to be directly benefited by the shopping park would be assessed on a front-footage basis along Northeast Fourth under the Local Improvement District method.

The Department of Public Works office drew tentative plans, based upon the trial "mockup" which had been so well received and the cost was estimated at \$59,000. It was agreed the city would contribute \$11,000 of this amount. The other \$48,000 would be assessed under the LID method against the property owners.

The Chamber committee met with the property owners involved and did a fine job of "selling" the program. To create the LID program, property owners representing at least 51 per cent of the assessed valuation had to sign petitions.

However more than 80 per cent was represented in the signatures of the 17 property owners who signed petitions. None of the 23 property owners involved actively opposed the shopping park LID.

Everything looked rosy at this point. An architectural firm was retained to draw final plans and these plans were included in a call for bids which went out last spring. The bids were to be opened in mid-May.

Everything looked great, but then.....

LETTER SENT TO PROPERTY OWNERS-----

May 14, 1965

The Commercial Problems Committee of the Chamber of Commerce has been working closely with City of Camas officials for many months in an effort to improve the attractiveness and convenience of downtown Camas, to give the area a modern shopping park atmosphere and to preserve present property values in the area. With the help and cooperation of property owners and the city we are now ready to take the first step toward completion of the project.

The proposed Downtown Shopping Park has been very favorably received by the community as a whole, and has met with enthusiastic response from shoppers, storekeepers, and a substantial number of property owners in the business district.

A meeting has been called for this Wednesday night, May 19th at 7:30 P.M. in the Camas City Council chambers to show pictures of the proposed shopping park, and to explain how the financing can be handled through a proposed L.I.D.

It is our plan to present the proposed Shopping Park to the City Council on Monday, May 24. The necessary public hearings will follow, and the project could be completed before the bad weather sets in this fall.

We urgently need your help and cooperation in our effort to preserve the property values in our area. Plan to attend the meeting in the Council chambers, Wednesday evening. If you have any questions please feel free to call the Chamber office.

Sincerely,

Glenn Farrell, Chairman
Commercial Problems Committee

Harold Zimmerman	O. V. Jacobsen
R. E. Lawton	Dr. Tom Williams
Fred Wright	Martin Berg
Allen Sheaffer	John Horning

WHEN THE BIDS WERE HIGH-----

Gloom settled thick when the city council opened the bids on May 19, 1966.

Combined bids of two firms whose total offers were lowest on the shopping park construction and on landscaping were more than \$133,000. For a project with only \$59,000 available for immediate financing, the Camas downtown shopping park looked as dead the proverbial dodo.

BUT WE CUT IT TO THE BONE-----

Bouncing back from discouragement, however, both city officials and Chamber committee members immediately tackled the problem of how to get by with the money available, or how to get more money.

They consulted with Bond & Perron, Portland landscape architects, about the bids and found ways to cut back the costs.

The previous bids were rejected as too high. Then Lewis Angelo, director of public works, and members of the committee met with the low bidders to work out an alternate plan cutting the expenditures to the minimum.

Some savings were made in eliminating individual drains from the planted areas. Others by eliminating certain catch basins, certain types of lighting, etc.

Finally the cost was pared to \$68,000 - with the provisions extra work could be done in the future should a federal grant applied for be approved.

AND SO IT IS NOW OCTOBER 28, 1966-----

You came to Camas to see one block - of four blocks - of what can be done with City Officials and the Chamber of Commerce working together. The rest of the blocks are under various phases of construction and development. Many resident have already commented favorably on the improved appearance of the "main street" although the shopping park is still far from completion.

City officials learned this week that the House and Urban Development Agency of the federal government has approved a grant of \$20,250 for Camas for street improvements and beautifications. Mayor Sampson has announced most of the money will go towards completing and expanding the shopping park.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON CAMAS' SHOPPING PARK-----

Q. Why is it called a shopping PARK instead of shopping MALL?

A. Because it is open to vehicular traffic and parking is allowed. A mall would be restricted to pedestrian traffic only. However the shopping park pedestrian-oriented. Pedestrians are given priority. Pedestrians are offered such facilities as extra-wide sidewalks, mid-block crosswalks, 20-foot street crossings, benches, public telephones, ten covered rest areas, etc.

Q. How much parking is permitted in Camas' shopping park?

A. There are seven diagonal, two parallel and one loading zone parking spaces on each side of the street.

Q. Is the traffic flow restricted in any way?

A. Two-way traffic is permitted in each block. However the speed limit will be held to 10 miles an hour because of the pedestrian priority.

Q. What about plantings and other beautification?

A. Tree, shrub and flower plantings are designed to give the shopping park a unitized appearance that is, all blocks will blend together as one big park. Sufficient space is provided the trees for decades of growth. There will also be two ornamental fountains, one drinking fountain and varicolored metal canopies.

Q. Whose responsibility will it be to care for the plants, etc.

A. Care and maintenance of the shopping park will be done by the city.

Q. How about lighting?

A. Ornamental lighting is planned throughout the shopping park. It will feature white ball-type globes on aluminum standards.

- Q. What will be the next step, after the shopping park is completed?
- A. According to city officials, providing off-street parking facilities is the next project on the list.
- Q. What is the total cost of Camas' Shopping Park?
- A. The first phase of construction is costing \$68,600. Additional work will be done with funds provided in a \$20,250 grant given the city by the Housing and Urban Development Agency.
- Q. Who bears the cost?
- A. Under a mutual agreement, the property owner benefited by the shopping park are \$52,800 under a Local Improvement District. The city is providing \$15,800.
- Q. How much is per property owner along the shopping park?
- A. It figures out to \$33 per front foot.
- Q. Do the property owners have to pay this all at once?
- A. No. Under the LID agreement the assessments are made in ten equal installments over a period of ten years if desired.