

### ***Paving Over Paradise To Put Up Parking Lots (743 words)***

I was scrolling through my Facebook feed the other day, when I happened to stumble across a link to local filmmaker Lorne Bailey's 20 minute video, "Some Lots: A Tour of 3 Downtown Parking Lots." It looked intriguing, so I hit the link, watched and was totally blown away.

Scored and narrated like a tongue-in-cheek 1960s TV documentary, it's a little gem that graphically and irreverently illustrates how downtown Winnipeg became one long series of parking lots.

For evidence of that, fast forward to the film's one minute, fifty second mark, to see an aerial map of downtown that lights up an embarrassment of parking venues in a lovely translucent red. So many parking lots, that they almost seem to outnumber the surrounding buildings.

Which isn't far from the truth.

Equally eye opening is the history of the church, business block and hotel that were demolished to make way for just three of Winnipeg's many downtown parking lots.

The first one featured in the film is a triangular surface lot adjacent to what is now the Burton Cummings Theatre, where the old Grace Church once stood. A Methodist landmark that housed a spectacular organ and a large congregation, it was also site for classes in what would become Wesley College, flagship institution for the University of Winnipeg.

Despite its historical significance, the church was razed in 1955 to usher in what the film sardonically refers to as "a new era of parking pride," another asphalt "corral for our steel steeds."

And so it goes as the film explores two other "parks for cars" constructed after demolishing Winnipeg's historic Empire Hotel and McIntyre Block, leaving the viewer to wonder what other significant buildings were leveled to make way for our cars.

But what's really interesting is when you stop to consider all of this in a current context. The context being the desperate need for more downtown space for housing, parks and heat-busting trees and a recent city proposal to establish a 970 square meter, micro park near the Burton Cummings Theatre.

Perhaps predictably, the only person complaining about the new micro park plan is the nearby parking lot owner, who expressed dismay at changing the lot's road access from Smith St. to Donald.

Only time will tell if the parking lot owner prevails.

In the meantime, given the number of people now working from home and the extent of empty downtown office space, maybe the mayor and city councillors need to ask themselves this somewhat burning question - do we really need all of those parking lots?

Should a staggering 40% of our downtown real estate be devoted to parks for cars instead of gathering spaces for people?

I don't think so. Because the reality is, our world is changing, the climate is changing and our downtown and modes of transportation need to change along with it.

So, maybe it's time for the city to stop planning for yesterday and start planning for tomorrow. A tomorrow in which our representatives summon the fiscal good sense to buy up some of those half-empty surface lots and transform them into micro forests, parks and vibrant gathering spaces.

I'd certainly vote for that, over the \$2.8 million the mayor intends to spend, just on the "planning phase," for widening Kenaston Ave. and extending Chief Pequis.

And here's a thought for Winnipeg developers - how about buying up some of those lots to build housing and grocery stores, so that people can actually live downtown, without need of a car or a lot to park it in.

For those of you who commute downtown to work every day and who might bitterly complain about losing a couple of parking lots, my response would be this:

Do you really need 3 to 5 parking spots per person? Is unlimited car convenience reason enough to dedicate acres of valuable land to the profusion of unsightly, half empty lots that currently litter downtown, an area where fewer and fewer people live, work or even frequently visit?

As geographer and urban planner, Marc Vachon, has observed, "There is no doubt that downtown Winnipeg's parking landscape has been one of the main causes of the area's lack of vitality, cohesiveness and vibrancy."

All of which leads him to conclude "that there really is such a thing as too much parking."

To say that I agree with him would be an understatement. I only hope that city hall has the good sense to do something about it.

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You can screen "Some Lots" @ <https://vimeo.com/201757105>

