

Today's Vacaville varies widely from 1946 plan

By Jerry Bowen

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The title page says, "A Plan For The City Of Vacaville," and the document was submitted to the Planning Commission of the city of Vacaville by Planning Consultant, H. H. Jaqueth in 1946.

In the Forward section it stated, "The small city of today is a challenge of opportunity and of responsibility. Because of its possibilities for growth and because of its comparative fluidity, the small city is in a unique position to benefit from planning.

"Two primary problems confront every community: The improvement of present day conditions and the anticipation of future needs. Growth of the city usually produces the impetus for interest in planning. Growth itself produces little reason for planning but the results of growth attract attention to unplanned features of the community. Oftentimes, it swells the increase in revenue. Growth is a responsibility to be met by far-sighted planning, and produces changes. The community is always in a process of change."

The plan included suggestions for improvements to the Vacaville streets, rehabilitation of parts of Main Street, a subdivision ordinance, and suggestions for a city park and a combination city hall and fire station.

Of particular interest were the proposals for a Ulati Park and a suggestion as to where to locate the city hall. At the time, City Hall and the police station were still in the Old Town Hall on East Main Street.

The old 1898 Vacaville High School still reigned supreme on "College Hill" near the Ulati Bridge and no plans were included then to tear it down. That didn't happen until 1954, eight years later.

So what was the proposed location for the Ulati Park?

The plan described the site as follows, "The proposed Ulati Creek Park site offers the Community of Vacaville a public reservation of peculiar attractiveness. Its size is roughly six acres, consisting of the fairly level ground embraced in the angle of Dobbins and Kendal Streets and the land bordering Ulati Creek down to a point where it crosses the Main Street Bridge.

"There are a number of existing trees on the upper or level ground, and, of course,

many cottonwoods and other small trees in the Ulatis Creek valley itself.

“This whole area is capable of being developed into a beauty spot, which will contribute much to Vacaville’s charm, and it provides at the same time a worthy site for the proposed new City Hall, which would be located at the north end of Bernard Street.”

Bernard Street? Where is Bernard Street?

Well, it was recently eliminated during the latest downtown improvement. It used to connect Main Street about where the throughway that leads to the downtown library is located today.

By the 1946 plan, the City Hall would have been placed facing Kendal Street with its main entrance approached directly from Bernard Street. Ornamental shrubs and street trees were to be placed around the City Hall that would ‘enhance the facade of the building, while its front end to the east of Bernard Street would look upon an ample parking space accommodating some hundred cars.”

A wide public park area or picnic ground was included in the plan on the flat area north of the City Hall and reaching to the Ulatis Creek ravine. Existing trees as well as other trees to be planted, would be provided for the increased enjoyment of visitors.

The area along the path leading northward from Main Street near Ulatis Creek was proposed to be used for open air meetings, flower shows or even as a municipal rose garden.

On the ground bordering Dobbins Street, a children’s playground was suggested that could be equipped with playground equipment and a field house, where ... ‘children could enjoy themselves under supervision while their elders lingered in the park or picnic area.”

The plan for Ulatis Park concluded by saying, “The possibilities that lie in the future development of the Ulatis Creek ravine itself are hard to overestimate. With paths extending high enough up on the slopes to avoid winter washout and with trees and shrubs planted along its slopes after judicious clearing is done, a creek valley of unusual attractiveness could be secured which might well be considered a planned gradual extension of the wider park area with the City Hall on its south edge.”

Under other parts of the plan the downtown historic district would have been unlike anything we have today. Facelifts of all the historic buildings would have been accomplished, making it look like the historic buildings were built during the 1950s.

Obviously, today we can see that the plan was not followed and the results aren't too bad at all. One suggestion, though, to place 'paths extending high enough up on the slopes (of Ulatis Creek) to avoid winter washout," might have been a better idea.

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