

The Mess at 600 Mass

didn't know what they had signed. As the confrontation developed, a curious pattern began to emerge. On one side, there was the Anderson crowd calling public meetings, inviting citizen involvement and saying to the media, "Come, look. See for yourselves." On the other side were the city fathers, speaking only when spoken to, and then saying little more than "We have ordained the Anderson Building must go, and it shall be so."

Ironic, to say the least, that "The Zoo" was conducting their campaign to save the building in the best tradition of democratic principles and procedures, while the elected representatives were doing their best to circumvent them. About the only communication volunteered by the city fathers was a letter to the editor of the Journal-World that ran in its December 16 edition, Monday.

Although the letter was billed as a response by the city, it was signed only by Don Binns, the only member of the Gang of Four whose term of office does not expire April 7. Coincidence, of course. The letter was no response at all. It was a ridiculous, yet vicious attack on the character of Bryan Anderson, questioning his motives and branding him as a "shrewd speculator." Bryan?

Not satisfied with taking one cheap shot, Binns made a low-brow attempt to impugn the reputations of the citizens who were supporting Anderson's efforts to save his business. Public nuisances and sponges, they were called, eager "to feed at the public trough." (Tell us, Mr. Binns, whose money backs the checks that pay for that portable larder hanging over your belt?)

In short, the city's answer answered nothing--except to show clearly the disdain they felt for those who disagreed with them, and

the arrogance with which they intended to carry out the destruction of 600 Mass. At a time when intelligent men would have sought understanding and compromise, all they could think of were insults and their misplaced pride.

The effect of the Binns letter was evident in the mood of Anderson's mob at next evening's city commission meeting. As the commissioners squirmed through the agenda toward the crucial downtown development item, they frequently cast uneasy glances at a packed gallery in which four of five wore big pink "stop the wrecking ball" buttons. And dozens more had gathered outside, waiting for the action to start.

The commission tried to pull the fuse by quickly voting four to one to refer the downtown proposal to the planning commission without any discussion. But the audience was having none of it, and the commission found it impossible to slip on to the next item. As the din grew, somebody moved for a recess, and chairs and feet shuffled as three or four commissioners stood up.

"Go ahead and recess all you want," came a challenge from the gallery, "We'll be here when you get back." Recognizing the truth of the statement, the commissioners decided to sit back down and push on, regardless. That's when Bryan Anderson strode to the center of the room and demanded to know, "Why won't you guys talk about this? What are you afraid of?"

That started it. Voices rose and tempers with them. Commissioner Binns adjourned three times and Major Carter did his imitation of a pomegranate. Some flunky scurried out the side door and, minutes later, police cars appeared in the alleyways surrounding City Hall.

Somehow, local attorney Jack

Klinknett surfaced in the middle of the melee and made an impromptu, but effective plea for a civilized discussion. A tense truce shrouded the room as both sides prepared to explain their views.

Klinknett and Anderson went first. They talked mainly about the injustice to Bryan, the obvious unsuitability of the space for a parking lot and the gross extravagance of it all. Their final plea was on behalf of the 60-year-old building itself. Let the city keep Anderson's building and use it for any purpose, they said, but don't tear it down. Spare 600 Mass.

Then the commissioners spoke. Marci Francisco started by pointing out the absence of any comprehensive plan indicating the need for a parking lot at that location and the extraordinarily high cost of the project. She concluded by suggesting the building be used by the city for much-needed warehouse space. Applause from the gallery.

The next three speakers offered arguments of varying inanity, the most honest of which was Mayor Ed's, "It's ugly." The honor of delivering the death blow passed into the eager hands of Barkley Clark, and he was equal to the task.

Barkley talked about the city's obligation to the out-of-town investors who bought the parking bonds; explaining that the presence of a thoroughly renovated, fireproof steel-and-concrete building on the site would cheapen their investment. He also pointed out that any unusual behavior on the part of the city might affect its standing in the municipal bond market. Just the sort of arguments one expects from such a humanitarian.

But the general theme of his points followed a line that has been heard all too often: It might

have been a bad decision but we're duty-bound to stick by it because we're stuck with it. This is the same pitch Clark used in trying to force the Haskell Loop down the throats of East Lawrence residents five years ago.

Having pushed this line of reasoning as far as he dared, Barkley concluded by telling the Anderson supporters how happy he was to see so many people getting involved in community affairs, how gratified he was that they had seen the need for a downtown plan, and how hopeful he was that they all would continue to participate in the important decisions yet to be made.

It was a brazen-faced affront of the highest order, and everyone in the audience was stunned silent. Except one. With an accusing finger poised just inches above her lap, Shelley Miller spoke clearly: "You underestimate us, Barkley."

And that is the answer to how the Anderson Affair came about. In their concerted assault on Bryan Anderson's rights and property, the City Fathers, the City Manipulator and the money-maddened minority they serve, all completely misread the intent of the citizenry and underestimated the strength of their resolve.

None of the above will ever admit they erred in their decision to destroy 600 Mass, but none of the above ever dreamed that an "eyesore" could become such a pain in the ass.



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