

A tool of very last resort

City may need to use eminent domain in Glenwood

No prudent local government exercises its right of eminent domain as anything other than a last resort. Of all the cities in Lane County — or Oregon, for that matter — it's hard to think of another less inclined to consider the condemnation of private property than Springfield.

So it's a safe bet that the Springfield City Council had good reason when it recently authorized city officials to go to court, if necessary, to secure private property needed for the first phase of its \$10.5 million Franklin Boulevard makeover.

The reason lies in the importance of the Franklin Boulevard project, which is an essential first step toward revitalizing the gritty, underutilized urban area sandwiched between Eugene and Springfield.

Earlier this year, the city won a prestigious national award from the American Planning Association, a professional organization representing U.S. city and regional planners, for its long-term plan aimed at revitalizing Glenwood.

The plan covers 267 acres and envisions transforming properties along its two major corridors — Franklin Boulevard and McVay Highway — into a flourishing riverfront district with new homes, offices, restaurants and stores.

None of that happens without first rebuilding the portion of Franklin Boulevard between Mississippi Avenue and McVay Highway into a more functional, attractive boulevard with on-street parking, sidewalks, a center median and bike lanes. The city began extending sewer service down McVay Highway earlier this year.

After years of planning and hard work, Glenwood has had a few no-

table successes in recent years. They include a new Planned Parenthood headquarters and BRING Recycling Center, as well as Franz Bakery, which moved to Glenwood from Eugene several years ago. Last year, a new hotel opened in Glenwood and its owner is considering construction of a second. Glenwood already has begun shedding its long-time image as a place people pass through on their way to somewhere else.

Such projects — along with Lane Transit District's EmX system, which has fundamentally changed the transportation dynamics on Franklin between Springfield and Eugene — have brought a new level of visibility and attractiveness that is drawing attention from other developers who are interested in Glenwood's prime riverfront potential. But outdated and inadequate Franklin Boulevard remains a major impediment and has been a key factor in developers' decisions to abandon or delay proposed projects in recent years.

Given the importance of the Franklin Boulevard project, it's imperative that the city have the ability to proceed if officials fail to reach an agreement with a property owner — or owners — affected by the project. That's a distinct possibility with any major construction project, and a conceptual design for the Franklin Boulevard project shows that it will to dislocate several businesses, one or more of which may reject the compensation offered by the city in exchange for their properties.

No city should exercise its right of eminent domain lightly — but it should be prepared, if necessary, to do so when a vision, such as the long-sought revitalization of Glenwood, is at stake.