

WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 2008

## Bipolar Disorder of Chickendale Cowbirds



Some people fondly remember the heart of downtown Springdale before the West Sunset Mega-Billboard Menagerie and the World's Largest Strip Mall on Thompson, but Perry Webb, Chief Cowbird, says forget it, because the effort to keep downtown Springdale economically viable is a waste of time. "Emma's not going to be like it was in the 1940s on a Saturday afternoon where it's jam-packed full of people. The modern economy won't allow it to be the thriving economic center it once was."

The Chamber is reluctant to spend too much of the City's funds on redevelopment and has decided to scrap any plan for helping downtown and its small independent local businesses. "We can't just throw money in a hole," Webb said, "because the economy is in a slump." Gene Austin, a 56-year employee of Spencer Printing on Emma Avenue, said that's not the only thing killing existing businesses on Emma. "I don't think there's anything that could happen in downtown because everything's moving west," he added, referring to big businesses and attractions moving out near I-540 and the new Arvest Bank Ballpark.

There is a reason for that, Gene, and it's not the economy. Last week, Webb and the Cowbirds announced that they had hired Pizzuti Solutions, the Danter Company and Hodges and Associates to develop a Master Plan for the largely undeveloped 1,100 acre section of the city out west of I-540 around the ballpark. The cost of this plan and studies for research is about \$250,000 and will be paid by funds from the Cowbird's Springdale Tomorrow program, Webb said. They

can't throw money down a hole on downtown, but they have a quarter million dollars to do a study to encourage sprawl on land owned by someone other than the City of Springdale or existing small businesses.

Brian Parker, one of the out of state consultants from Pizzuti Solutions, said no new taxes are being considered at this time to fund the development, but seeking tax incentives from the state are a possibility. Sounds like the Cowbirds are planning to get Springdale to go for a TIF District that would take money from the public schools to develop that "blighted" area out around I-540 and Arvest Bank Ballpark.