

History Corner # 7, Part Two: The Apartments - The Fight Continued

by John Hemler

[Before you start reading about the apartment mess – part two, I have to make a correction. When I introduced John, our author, in the last issue, I demoted him to Lt. Col. WRONG! It should have been Colonel John Hemler. Furthermore, I butchered his wife’s name as well. Her name is Margie. Sorry John and Margie! ~ Fred van Berkel, Historian]

1. July 16, 1989: Jim Arnholz (Belshaw) devoted his entire Journal column to what he initially dubbed as the “Ancient Mariner Apartments”. Later in his column, he wrote: “Then it hit me. These are the UNM Student Ghetto apartments of my college days! So what I propose is that we make them a permanent display: The Albuquerque ‘60s College Apartment Museum.”Failing that, I think the least we can do is chip in for a small plaque with the following inscription:

ANCIENT MARINER APARTMENTS
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean
Renters, renters everywhere,
And not a cleaning deposit to be had.

2. July 17, 1989: A District Court judge issued a temporary injunction to stop work on the site. This injunction was lifted a short time later, primarily because TR residents/ associations were unable to post a \$25,000 bond to cover owners’ potential losses. However, the lawsuit seeking removal because of private/public nuisance remained on the court docket.
3. July 20, 1989: A special meeting of the City Council was held concerning the apartments. TR residents showed a video of the apartments, presented a petition to have them removed, and individuals spoke to the council, pro and con. Two bills were also presented: a) Councilor Baca’s proposal to condemn the apartments; b) Councilor Pete Dinelli’s proposal to have the City Planning Department examine whether the site could be purchased and used as a park or other use. The Council delayed action on these proposals until their next regular meeting, and asked the City, TR residents, and owners to continue negotiations.
4. July 31, 1989 : The City Council, at its regular meeting, postponed action on the proposed condemnation bill (R-393) for 3 months. By a 5-4 vote, the Council approved the Dinelli bill(R-413). An onerous amendment was added, instructing the Planning Department Director to meet with TRNA to determine if it would be willing to see other City-funded projects in TR postponed or dropped in order to acquire the site.
5. August 16, 1989: A strongly worded TRNA letter to the Mayor condemned the amendment to R-413, stating that it would create “dissension and discord” (among the residents) and “would divide the community.” It also stated that TRNA had met with the Planning Director and found that “there are no projects to be negotiated under current law and funding.”
6. September 6, 1989: The Planning Department report was presented to the City Council. It estimated that the property/ apartments value, when fully completed, would be \$850,000 to

\$1,000,000. It also stated that “such an acquisition would have long term effects on the Capitol Program and several projects would need to be deferred.” It recommended that “Due consideration must be made before any such land purchase.” It also concluded that acquisition of the property through the process of eminent domain would be difficult to achieve and would increase the cost. The resolution was tabled.

7. September 6, 1989: TRNA and other neighborhood associations sent a letter to Mayor Shultz stating that the approach by the Planning Department was misdirected and that attention should be concentrated on eminent domain condemnation.
8. September 7, 1989: Mayor Shultz responded, stating that he was continuing to try all methods to resolve the issue.
9. September 22, 1989: Mayor sends a letter to the City Council President (Steve Gallegos) stating that his conversations with the owners’ attorney have indicated that they are willing to negotiate the sale of the apartments /land on reasonable terms, based upon appraisals from 2 independent sources. Mayor asked City Council to approve this negotiation process.
10. October 25, 1989: Because of campaigns and Mayoral/ Councilor elections in early October, a resolution(EC-458) to authorize the negotiation process was not introduced to the Council until this date.
11. November 5, 1989: City Council approved EC-458 by a 5-4 vote. TR residents packed the chambers. Consideration of the condemnation bill (R-393) was postponed another month.
12. December 1, 1989: A new Mayor (Louis Saavedra) and 4 new councilors took office.
13. December 8, 1989: The newly reconstituted City Council rejected R-393, the condemnation resolution.
14. December 22, 1989: A spokesman for the new Mayor stated that the new administration had dropped the proposal (EC-458) for the City to purchase the apartment complex because “there are no funds to purchase it .” He went on to state that “The City’s role will be to only ensure the complex is brought up to codes.”

These actions stunned TR residents, and, although the lawsuit to condemn the apartment complex as a “private/public nuisance” was still in the court system, all seemed lost!!