

I'm in Oslo. But I see a big case of Stockholm syndrome in Salt Lake.

Oslo » I've been away for a while, so I might have missed something.

But the idea that downtown Salt Lake City is wanting for restaurants, bars, things to do, tall buildings and upscale housing strikes me as odd. It seems that the only things the neighborhood lacks is housing that normal people can afford, and maybe being able to walk down the avenue without being plowed under by a car or frightened by generations of homeless people destroyed by madness.

But then came Ryan Smith, one of those young dudes who somehow turned some unremarkable software into a major fortune, bought the Utah Jazz and just lured Arizona's National Hockey League team to Utah.

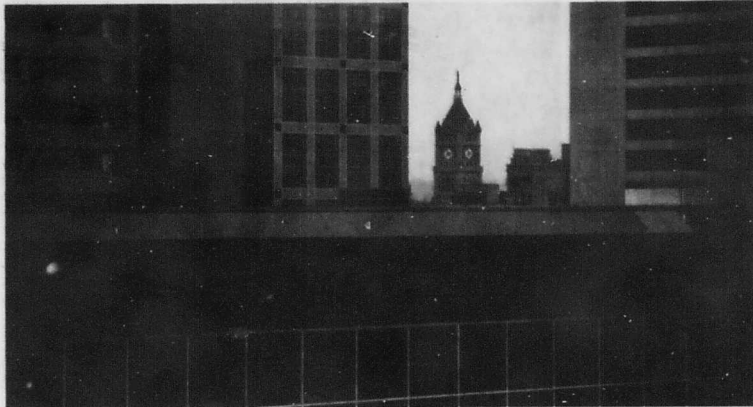
He started pitching his ideas for a new downtown sports and entertainment district, into which he says he will pour \$3 billion of his own money, if he can get something shy of another billion via a fractional hike in the city's local sales tax. And if the city will give him the power to redevelop the neighborhood to suit his Blade Runner-meets-Denver urban fancy.

It's not that any of this is an altogether bad idea, even though downtown SLC is already a vibrant neighborhood, a forest of construction cranes that's more of a 24-hour city every day.

What gnaws is that the real driving force here is not what Smith offers as much as what he threatens to take away.

The joy with which conservative state lawmakers and liberal city officials have all become giddy Smith acolytes, welcomed to his Delta Center owner's box and his countryside seats, feels like a case of Stockholm syndrome. You know, the dynamic where people held hostage start to sympathize with, even admire, their captors.

Imagine if our state lawmakers had been so eager to do something that would actually make Utah a better place. Such as, maybe, approving Medicaid expansion right away instead of



City Hall and downtown Salt Lake City on Jan. 25.

dragging their feet for years.

Our elected officials aren't being asked to measure Smith's plan against the status quo and decide whether it would be worth turning over so much public money and control to one developer, without even considering what other plans might be on offer.

They can only balance Smith's pitch against the possibility that, already looking for a new home for his hockey team, the smooth entrepreneur might move the Jazz out to the corner of 1900th Street and Plowed Ground, leaving a huge hole downtown.

There's no question that downtown is the place for modern sports temples. We see them in Denver, Phoenix, Cleveland, Atlanta, Indianapolis, Baltimore, San Francisco and, to the extent that it has a downtown, Los Angeles.



GEORGE PYLE

The Salt Lake Tribune

I've been to a few of those, and the atmosphere is striking. Ball parks and basketball/hockey stadiums surrounded by hotels and restaurants and served by frequent public transit is something any city should want.

But I can also point you to a few cities (mostly in Europe) where nightlife and daylife are absolutely jumping, no sports in sight, thanks to a culture of year-round sidewalk dining, drinking

and strolling. Something SLC Mayor Erin Mendenhall also dreams of.

Remember, as Tribune's stats guy Andy Larsen has ably demonstrated, most of the cash dropped in these modern coliseums is not new money so much as it is discretionary spending not spent elsewhere, at movie theaters or bowling alleys or bars in other parts of the valley.

The fact that the valley's main sports venue, wherever it is, won't be a cash generator as much as a money siphon means Smith has city, county and state officials over the proverbial barrel.

The choice isn't between downtown as it is or downtown as Smith wants it. It's between what Smith wants or downtown without hockey or basketball. With a giant barn that either needs to be filled with more rock concerts, or torn down.

Some in Salt Lake City are still smarting from the missed opportunity to house the stadium for the Real Salt Lake soccer team, probably in the Fairpark area, where the Miller family now envisions a Major League Baseball stadium and ancillary developments — also with a very large taxpayer commitment.

(Once it seemed a big loss for Salt Lake City when the new printing plant then jointly owned by The Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News was built way out in West Valley. But it's probably just as well that that now-silent publishing facility isn't gathering dust downtown.)

So, sure, do Smith's deal. Keep the sports cash flowing to downtown. It's not as if, apparently, we have much of a choice.

George Pyle is the opinion editor of *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Progress is saving classic and superbly functional old things

The recent headlines and talk about a new sports and convention center in downtown Salt Lake and about renovating the two blocks between the Delta Center and City Creek are exciting.

But the related possibility of knocking down or moving Abravanel Hall to make it all possible is deeply disturbing and misconceived.

Most Utahns know about this iconic building — know of its classic beauty, its superb acoustics, the elegance of the gold leaf and chandeliers and the grand staircase in its glass-enclosed lobby that looks out of its huge window on our cityscape. And most sense that trying to replace or move this symbol of our commitment to culture and the arts could be a generational mistake.

But what most Utahns do not know is the backstory of how it got there, and the coming together of diverse interests that made it possible. It is a 50-year-old story, but it needs to be told, because the sacrifice and unity that built it is another reason for never letting it go.

In 1975, I was a young political consultant who had the year before managed Jake Garn's uphill but successful campaign for the U.S. Senate. We moved back to our home near Washington D.C., where the nation was gearing up to celebrate the Bicentennial. Then to my surprise I got a call from the Utah Bicentennial Commission. Would I, they



Thierry Fischer conducts a rehearsal of the Utah Symphony at Abravanel Hall in Salt Lake City on May 25, 2023.

wondered, consider returning to Utah to run a Salt Lake County Bond Election to build a new center for the arts in downtown Salt Lake City? It would be, among other things, the long-imagined home for the renowned Utah Symphony.

And the only way such a hall could come about, they had concluded, was for Salt Lake County voters to pass a

bond election — essentially to vote to increase their taxes to fund the concert hall. I was instantly drawn to the cause — my wife Linda is violinist and string teacher — but the idea of the out-door-sports types minded hunters and fishermen of Utah voting to tax themselves to build a costly, high-brow concert hall that they might never set foot in seemed to be quite a stretch.

But it ended up being something much more than that. It was a chance for diverse Utahns to come together, to be unified

in a cause bigger than their own personal interests, to make a statement about culture and priorities for their children and grandchildren. And for Salt Lake County residents, it was an opportunity to create balance between sports and the arts — to embrace the professional performing arts during the bi-

centennial year just as they would embrace professional sports when the Utah Jazz would come to the city. (Interestingly, the timeline for the two converged with Symphony Hall being completed just as the Jazz moved here from New Orleans in 1979.)

As we began the bond election campaign, the early public opinion polls showed little chance of success. The economy was trying to emerge from recession and double-digit inflation, and people were not happy about the possibility of paying more taxes

to build a hall for the use of what they perceived as rich symphony patrons.

On the other hand, the numbers showed the growth and health of the city and state economies would benefit from a greater arts presence which could attract more business and more jobs, and there seemed to be a perception that no great city should be without some symbol of its commitment to the arts — a commitment that would trickle down to our schools and our families and to every kid taking piano or violin any kind of music lessons.

The goal was not just to build a center for the performing arts — it was to build one of the great halls of the world — one with unmatched acoustics and beauty. I think it was that vision — of a world-class hall that symbolized Utah's balanced approach between arts/culture and sports/recreation that brought everyone together in that seemingly impossible bond election.

We built the whole campaign around volunteers, manning phone banks day after day, explaining the economic and cultural benefits to voters. The volunteers were a marvelously varied group consisting of musicians, dancers, actors, and yes, sports-lovers and hunters and fishermen, each reaching out to their own supporters and friends. We felt the strength of being united in a cause that would benefit generations.

The bond election passed by the narrowest of margins. I will never forget that election night. The results came in slowly as we all gathered to watch — all those who had worked so hard, from prima ballerinas to trombone players and from sports enthusiasts to parents of kids taking piano. And when the TV stations announced that we had won, everyone was hugging each other, and giving emotional high-fives. The mental image I still see in my mind's eye is Obert Tanner and Maurice Abravanel, two majestic, passionate, white-haired arts-patriarchs, embracing each other, tears rolling down their cheeks. A dream had come true.

Abravanel Hall is not a building to be replaced, but preserved. This is not a hall to be moved, but to stay forever right smack in the heart of our city. This is not a beautiful shrine of our past, but a key to the balance and vibrancy of our future.

Progress is not just about building new things; it is about saving classic and wonderfully functional old things.

We need to keep it, and keep it where it is, for the sake of our past, and for the sake of our future. This building is not replaceable, and it is not movable, and if we lose it, we will never get it back. And among the losers will be our children and our grandchildren.

Long live Abravanel Hall. In a time of division and polarization, let it and what it represents pull us together and unite us now, just as it did 50 years ago.

Richard Eyre worked to pass the bond to build Abravanel Hall.