

## Group has another vision for city's problems

Written by Susann Kaltwasser Guest opinion

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**Online**For more information about Salem Community Vision's plan, visit [salemcommunityvision.com](http://salemcommunityvision.com).

The Salem City Council tonight will take up two of the most important issues our city has faced in a long time: how to move forward with a new facility for the Salem Police Department and how to make sure our entire Civic Center will not collapse in a major earthquake.

The city staff has put forward a plan to build a brand new police facility on the current site of Mirror Pond, north of City Hall, and to make extensive renovations and repairs to City Hall, including a new City Council chambers and seismic reinforcement of the library. They estimate the cost of this project at \$80.5 million, a cost that would have to be financed with a significant increase in our property taxes.

Last year, a group of active citizens convened who were concerned that the city plan was seriously flawed. We decided to call ourselves Salem Community Vision and to dedicate ourselves to more community involvement and greater fiscal responsibility. We analyzed the city staff proposal and listened to the community. We have held two community forums that were attended by more than 150 citizens. We have spoken to over 25 civic groups.

After talking to hundreds of Salem citizens about this issue, we have concluded that the city proposal is on the wrong track. The proposal is too costly for taxpayers to support. A recent poll commissioned by the city also supports our position. The poll conducted in January by DHM Research shows that less than half of the respondents thought the bond measure was a good idea. Worse yet, pollsters found that "the intensity of those opposed to a bond measure is greater than those who think it would be a good idea. Thirty percent of voters felt 'strongly' that it is a bad idea."

A bond election in November to finance the current \$80.5 million plan is clearly headed for failure. Salem Community Vision sees a better way.

We believe it would be possible to build a new police facility on a different site for a cost of approximately \$20 million, perhaps reusing an existing building. We also believe it would be possible to do the needed seismic reinforcement of City Hall and the library as well as other necessary improvements to the Civic Center at a cost of around \$20 million. By cutting the cost of the entire project in half, we think city taxpayers will support a modest increase in their property taxes to do what absolutely needs to be done, and done soon.

We urge all active citizens like ourselves to communicate with your city councilor and to come to the City Council meeting tonight to encourage the council to get on the right track in meeting our essential community needs.

Susann Kaltwasser of Salem is one of the co-founders and current chair of the Salem Community Vision. She can be reached at [salemcommunityvision@yahoo.com](mailto:salemcommunityvision@yahoo.com).