

# Police facility; where do we go from here?

Gambling better not fall out of fashion any time soon.

Salem voters this week supported the measures that were funded by lottery money or someone else's dollars. Not surprisingly, these same voters, like other residents of the state, rejected any effort to tax themselves.

Think about it. Voters on Tuesday approved Measure 96 to help veterans gain better access to federal and state benefits, including those that involve home financing and health care. The now-approved measure allocates 1.5 percent of net lottery proceeds to pay for the program.

Measure 98 also passed Tuesday night, and while its money comes from unallocated revenue accrued during the past 10 years of economic growth, it expands career technical education (CTE) and drop-out prevention efforts without costing the average taxpayer a dime. And initial reports estimate the Salem-Keizer School District will be the biggest recipient of the dollars, garnering a \$10.2 million piece of the pie. But again, no Mid-Valley resident is going to be taxed for this effort to improve the district's high-school graduation rate, which currently sits among the lowest in the nation.

Measure 99, which again targets lottery revenue, will fund the Outdoor School, a field science program that takes students in fifth or sixth grade into the Oregon outdoors to learn. The week-long program was easily cut from many school budgets when funds were tight, but now, thanks to Measure 99, many more students should be able to take advantage of the program without taxpayers feeling a pinch.

Unfortunately, Measure 24-399, the city of Salem's \$82 million police general obligation bond, failed. The Secretary of State's office reports that as of Thursday afternoon, 62,305 ballots had been counted and the

proposed 148,000-square-foot facility that would have included a 911 call center and crime lab was losing 52 to 47 percent.

Even with thousands of ballots left to be counted, said Marion County Clerk Bill Burgess, more than likely, the outcome isn't going to change.

"We have counted more than 90 percent of the ballots, and those ballots that didn't have signatures or whose signatures didn't match, and the ones we're picking up from places like Washington, Clackamas and Multnomah counties likely aren't going to affect the outcome," Burgess said.

The defeat is sending city officials back to the drawing board. The police need a new facility. The Statesman Journal editorial board endorsed the ballot measure earlier this election season, and stands by its decision that the city's police force is crowded into its 26,641-square-foot space on the first floor of the Vern Miller Civic Center. The men and women who give selflessly to protect residents are more than cramped. The headquarters was built in 1972 for 108 officers and now houses 190 sworn officers, 118 civilians and countless volunteers who work out of the headquarters on occasion.

There is little privacy in interview rooms where victims can often hear their abusers make threats in adjoining rooms. Storage for gear that has grown with technology is nil, and witnesses and suspects often cross paths.

But we'll ask the question for residents. Does the city really need 148,000 square feet at a cost of \$82 million?

Voters didn't think so, especially since the new police headquarters would be built on the former O'Brien Auto Group site with no seismic retrofitting to the city's civic center or library.

Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore was optimistic despite the setback.

"While I was excited by the opportunity to have a facility bond measure move

forward, I was clearly disappointed with the results. The fact that the police department needs a new, functional police facility remains unchanged. I still believe a police facility must be built to meet community needs 40 to 50 years into the future, and sized to include the essential police functions of an agency our size."

He expects future developments regarding a new facility will come at the direction of the new mayor and incoming city council.

Brian Hines, former mayoral candidate Carole Smith and Salem Community Vision Steering Committee member Jim Scheppke ponied up a little less than \$2,000 of their own money to get that word out, and it obviously struck a chord.

Hines, who created a Salem Can Do Better website, said the measure failed to protect everybody who works at City Hall or who visits the Salem Public Library. He says without hesitation that the city needs a new police facility, but he wants to keep everyone safe, not just police officers.

"I think the city did a great job of informing the people of the need for the facility, but it was just too big, too expensive and it left others using or visiting the library or civic center unsafe. I have a daughter and now grandchild. I would not want them in the library during the big one," Hines said.

The Salem Area Chamber of Commerce-backed Keep Salem Safe political action committee, by contrast, spent more than \$100,000 to spread the message about the need for a new police headquarters, but it didn't seem to matter to voters who don't want government spending their hard-earned cash without full accountability.

Hines vows to work with the city and other officials on what comes next.

One Plan B idea was resurrected this week. The plan would revive and

update one that was proposed in 2013 to build the police station *and* seismically retrofit the civic center. Three years ago, its cost estimates were about \$55.8 million. Now it's thought that adding three or four years of inflation will bring the cost for both projects to more than \$70 million, which is still less than the \$82-million-plan that voters rejected Tuesday.

It's hoped that the new old plan could be on the ballot in May 2017, passed and all projects completed by October 2018.

It sounds like a pipe dream. But the need for a new police headquarters is too real and city workers and visitors at the civic center deserve protection as well.

Returning to the drawing board seems like a sound way to get both.