

\$82M question: What kind of police station does Salem need?



Now, 190 sworn officers work at the current facility

Salem voters will be asked to green light an \$82 million police facility this election day. *Whitney Woodworth / Statseman Journal*

Walk through the Salem Police Department — navigate around the maze of cubicles and desks shared by 190 officers, detectives and sergeants, past the teetering towers of evidence, next to the interview rooms where victims can hear their perpetrators from across the hall — and the need for a new facility is obvious. Even opponents of the \$82 million bond measure on the Nov. 8 ballot agree to that.

The real questions are: What kind of facility does the city need, and how big is big enough?

City subcommittees and task forces met for nearly six years before arriving at the current proposal: a new building away from city hall, with 148,000

square feet of space, including a new home for the 911 center and crime lab, all at a cost of \$82 million.

Opponents of the measure critique the size, price and features of the proposed station. Smaller, cheaper public safety buildings in Oregon are often cited as examples. A series of tours at the Salem police facility and other, nearby buildings, revealed three distinct styles of workplaces with drastically different price tags.



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At the Salem police station, a 26,641-square-foot space tucked into the first floor of the 1970s concrete tower that also houses the Salem civic center and the library, things are both unavoidable and hard to find.

Sounds of flushing toilets, slamming doors and talking people carry through the uninsulated ceiling. That last issue has proven to be an embarrassing problem, Salem police Deputy Chief Steve Bellshaw said. Victims sitting in one interview room can overhear their abusers' heated threats from a few rooms down.

If the hallways seem cramped, it's because additional offices were squeezed into the original halls as the facility quickly filled up. The Vern Miller Civic Center, built in 1972 for \$10 million, was the largest single project undertaken by the city. Within less than a decade, the department outgrew the building.

Bellshaw attributed the outmoded station to poor planning and lack of funding.

"This building was kind of doomed from the beginning," he said. "When I started here in 1989, 27 years ago, our dispatch center was here, our crime lab was here, all of our equipment was here, and as we've grown, we've had to push all that stuff off-site to other places."

He walked through the wood-paneled maze that is the current facility. A former child abuse and domestic violence detective, Bellshaw took issue with the lobby's lack of privacy and unwelcoming, cramped layout. There's no private room for taking information from sex abuse, domestic violence or child abuse victims, he said.



The gun evidence stage area at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Sex offenders trying to follow the law and register also have no privacy. Bellshaw said he wants a building where people feel safe and welcome, but he was told: "Your building discourages people from coming to talk to you. This is not inviting, and people can't find you."

He continued through the area behind the lobby, a crowded hallway dubbed "Grand Central Station" where victims, witnesses and suspects frequently cross paths, to the cadet area. About 20 14- to 21-year-old cadets work with Salem police, and many go on to become police officers. The desk, wedged next to a cluster of garbage cans, and their storage area, which is actually a wire-filled tech closet, isn't the most promising workplace for aspiring officers.

In a field where every agency is competing for new hires, Bellshaw said, he fears the cramped, inefficient quarters will drive good employees elsewhere.

"We're fortunate that we have great officers and we have a great reputation, so people are still coming to us, but that reputation is only going to hold up so long," he said.



Deputy Chief Steve Bellshaw look through evidence boxes at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Down the hall, 22 detectives share 900 square feet of cubicle space. Members of the traffic control unit surrender their personal locker space to accident reconstruction manuals. The SWAT team parks its vehicles in various locations off site, and ammunition is stashed into every spare closet. Officers carry evidence like bloody bedding from the parking garage and up an elevator shared with the public. Hundreds of thousands of items are stacked floor-to-ceiling in the evidence room, and the secured room set aside for drug evidence sits below the city attorney's office, regularly filling the building with the strong odor of marijuana. With no room to train, officers have to drive up to Brooks for mandatory training.

The freshly painted, flat-screen briefing room seemed out of place until Bellshaw explained that officers volunteered their time to pay for and install flooring and wainscoting. A volunteer painted a mural of Salem's former City Hall on one wall.

Bellshaw said police department staff are good-natured about the difficulties.

"They're not complainers," he said. "It's our job to make things better."

The DLR Group has built more than 50 police stations, Bellshaw said. After weeks spent evaluating the needs and current status of the department, including spending four days shadowing officers and interviewing 29 officer groups, consultants recommended the city build a 150,000-square-foot facility.



The traffic control unit area at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

The proposed headquarters have been labelled palatial and wasteful by bond measure opponents. A brochure by the political action committee Salem Can Do Better features a photo-shopped image of parked police vehicles. The usual background of the State Capitol building was swapped with the a photo of the towering marble Taj Mahal mausoleum.

The cost is too high, the proposed building is too large and earthquake preparedness is being ignored, said Salem Can Do Better co-director Brian Hines.

Hines takes issue with the proposed building he calls "super-sized" — it would be five times the size of the existing facility. The proposed facility including the 911 call center was dubbed the "full meal deal" at city council meetings.

This full meal deal, Hines said, is not right for the city.

A few weeks later after the formation of the anti-bond PAC, another group, Keep Salem Safe, surfaced in support of the bond measure.

The committee's co-director, TJ Sullivan, took part in the city's blue-ribbon task force appointed to help explore options for the new facility in 2014.



The storage area for SWAT team gear at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

"We're not making a Taj Mahal," Sullivan said. "We're building a police facility designed to be utilized. It's designed to grow."

The current 911 call center is not secure, Sullivan said. A car could easily be driven through the front of the building and completely shut down emergency communications for most of Marion, Polk and Lincoln counties. He said it makes sense to house dispatchers and officers in one secure, earthquake-proof facility.

Hines argued that spending \$11 million on a 911 center that won't be needed for another 10 years was unnecessary, especially with other, more pressing needs, like homelessness and the vulnerability of city hall during a large-scale earthquake.

"Right now, people in the library and the people at story time are at risk of being crushed to death in the "Big One"

earthquake," Hines said.

When the earthquake hits, how are police officials going to feel when they look out the window of the four-story new facility and watch city hall crumble, Hines asked. Seismic upgrades needed to be included in the bond, he added.

Sullivan said in the past, bonds have failed because too many issues were crammed into one measure. It's best to let the police facility and seismic upgrades go to vote separately, he said.

During a June 8 session of the Salem City Council, Mayor Anna Peterson requested a study of the seismic safety of the civic center and library to be undertaken and completed by the end of 2016 to ensure the safety and security of city staff and visitors. The motion passed unanimously.



See the inside of the current Salem Police Department facility

at City Hall. *ANNA REED / Statesman Journal*

Eugene

An office building fixer upper turned police headquarters



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In 2012, the Eugene police department moved into a renovated, 1980s office building. Their old facility, downtown at city hall, was cramped and crumbling. Like Salem's civic center, it would've been flattened by a large-scale earthquake.

The city purchased the 66,000-square-foot building six years ago for \$10.2 million and undertook about \$7 million in renovations. Rather than gut and retool the whole facility, the city was selective, said Mike Penwell, the city's principal facility project manager. It spent \$500,000 seismically retrofitting the building, and turned a portion of the below-grade parking garage into a cluster of secured holding cells and interview rooms. Most of the heating, worn-out plumbing and air-conditioning system was replaced. A new, street-facing entrance with stained glass and metal artwork was constructed.

"Overall, the building provides a positive identity for the police and community," police spokeswoman Melinda McLaughlin said.

Some things, like the retro brass accents, the rows of offices and oddly-patterned carpet, remained. The portion of the building that houses the operations support division still has hints of the dental office previously stationed there. Not every public safety component was able to be included at the new facility. The 911 communications center, evidence storage, special operations equipment and a training room are all off site.



Files stored at the Eugene Police Department. The city purchased the 66,000-square-foot building six years ago for \$10.2 million and undertook about \$7 million in renovations.

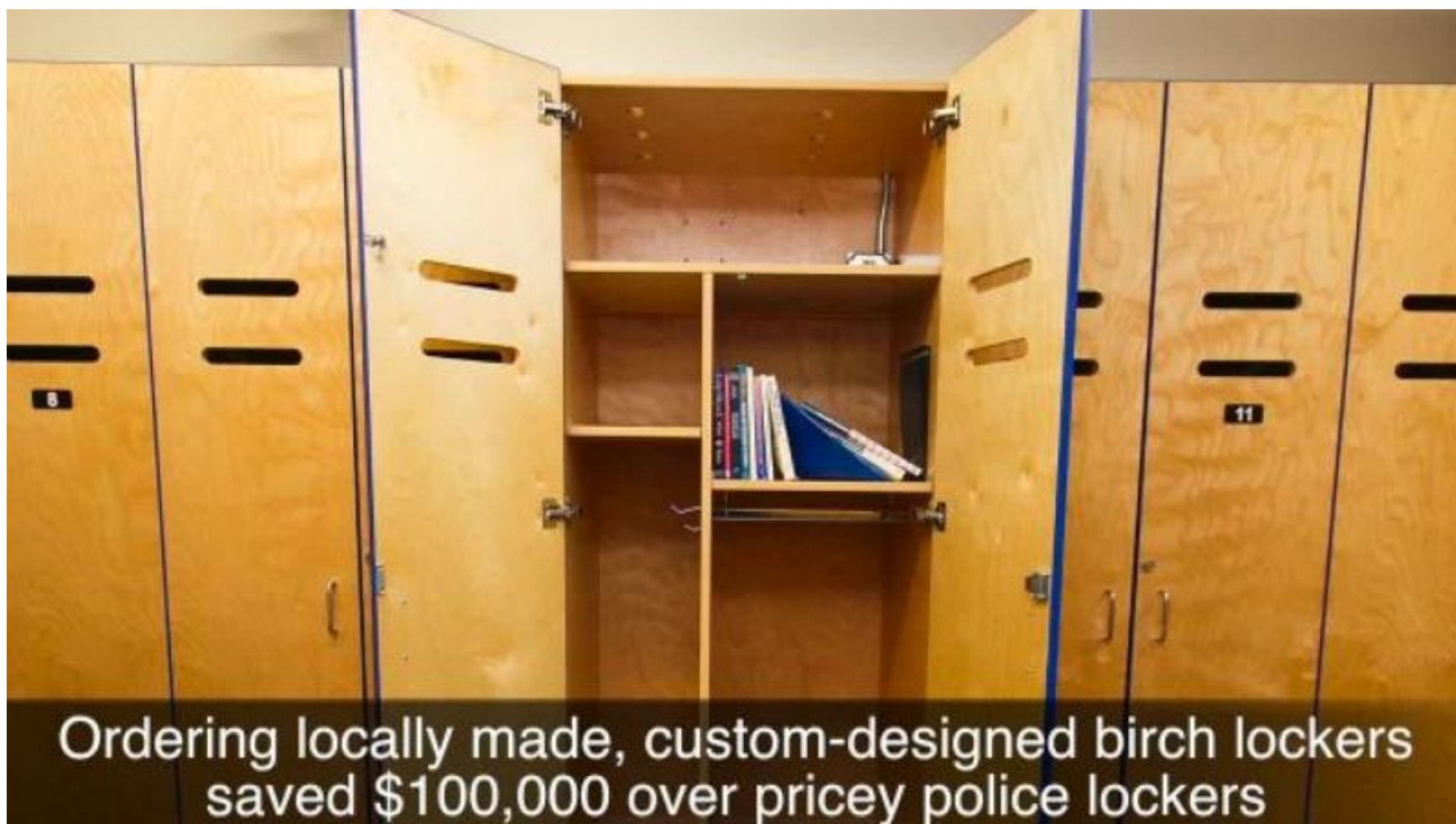
(Photo: MOLLY J. SMITH / Statesman Journal)

Police officials, project managers and officers met with architects to brainstorm ideas on how to save money and tailor the facility to police needs. Lt. Angie San Miguel said one of their ideas — to have a local cabinet maker construct custom-designed birch lockers instead of buying pricey police lockers — saved them more than \$100,000.

The department also has room to grow, Penwell said. About 5,000 square feet is available for expansion, but public parking space remains a concern, especially during large community meetings.

Buying and renovating an existing building near but not in downtown was the most practical choice for the city, Penwell said. Building a brand new facility would've been costly. Consultants estimated constructing a new police headquarters would have cost the city \$35 million in 2010

dollars.



See the inside of the Eugene Police Department, which moved to a new, renovated facility in 2012. *Molly J. Smith / Statesman Journal*

Keizer

Streamlined, modern



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Touring the Salem and Keizer facilities days apart is a lesson in contrast. At the Keizer Police Department, a 28,080-square-foot facility next to city hall and a community center, groups can pass each other in the hallway without one of the parties having to flatten themselves against the wall. With 35 sworn officers, Keizer has a staff one-fifth the size of Salem's police force, yet the building is slightly larger than Salem's current site.

Every room is wired for video and audio recording, and small touches, like ventilated lockers, a drying room for bloody evidence, the police radio dispatches piped in overhead and gun guards to keep walls scuff free, are

everywhere.

Visitors enter the department through an airy atrium and into a furnished lobby.

"We didn't want an institution feel with metal and steel," Deputy Chief Jeffrey Kuhns said. "We wanted a warm, living-room vibe."

After having a tiny lobby with no security in their old building, Keizer police want to ensure the safety of the police support specialists, who often are the target of threatening callers and visitors.

"They had a lot of fears about coming to work and doing their job on a daily basis," he said. "We made their safety priority number one."

The windows, doors and walls are bulletproof. An interview room next to the lobby offers a private spot for victims to report sexual abuse or domestic violence.

The private registration desk encourages sex offenders to register and report changes in address, Kuhns said, adding that it may be the reason why the city has such high reporting rates.



The evidence storage room at the Keizer Police Department, though already full of evidence, is a stark contrast to the overfilled area at the Salem Police Department.

(Photo: MOLLY J. SMITH / Statesman Journal)

The facility was built in 2009 as part of the \$15 million Keizer Civic Center. The new building was a vast improvement over the previous headquarters, a former elementary school. The city rebuilt a new city hall and police station on the same land. Building a one-story building on city-owned property was a huge cost-saver, Kuhns said.

The new facility was designed to make sure everything had a rhyme and reason, and features such as a sally port for police vehicles and a sterile processing rooming keep evidence accounted for and untainted. Having room to grow allows Keizer police to work in conjunction with other agencies. A Marion County parole and probation officer has a permanent, free office to meet with clients in Keizer, and police are working to bring in two Department of Human Services employees to work closely with officers on abuse cases. There are a few empty desks, but already the

department is beginning to run out of storage space, Kuhns said.

Salem's blue-ribbon task force toured Keizer Police Department, and no one said it was extravagant, costly or bloated, Sullivan said. They remarked on how efficient and well-laid-out the building is. He said that's what Salem needs — a safe, streamlined facility designed for growth.



See the inside of the Keizer Police Department, which moved to a new facility in 2009. *Molly J. Smith / Statesman Journal*

A DHM Research poll conducted in [March found about 58 percent](#) of Salem residents would support the \$82 million bond measure to build a new police facility.

Both proponents and opponents agree that Salem police need a safe, efficient space to work.

"The new police facility is something everybody recognizes

that we need," Sullivan said. "The question now is: Do you build it right or do you under-build it and keep paying to add on as time goes on? I use Kuebler Boulevard as an example. Kuebler was under-built from the start. Now were having to add on to it. If you think about the amount of time that's been wasted, the inconvenience, the number of accidents... It was really short-sighted to under-build it from the start."

Hines and Salem Can Do Better co-director Carole Smith praised Moore and the police department's work. They, and everyone else at city hall, deserve a safe, seismically-sound workplace, they said.



The narcotics evidence area at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

"We absolutely support a new police station," Smith said. "We need to make that really clear. We're not against a police station. We just feel this one is too big and too costly."

About 90 percent of residents polled by DHM Research in March said they were happy with Salem's police force and public safety. More than half stated they were very satisfied.

In times of strife and strained community-police relations, Salem is lucky to have such a great relationship with its police force, Sullivan said, adding that officers deserve a facility that helps them do their job of keeping the city safe.

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Plans to expand the Salem police facility have been tossed around since the mid-1990s. The police staff of 108 has grown to 190 sworn officers and 118 civilians, plus volunteers who sometimes work in the headquarters. One option — to triple the police department's space while keeping it on the civic center campus — was scrapped after receiving public opposition. The city created a Blue Ribbon Task Force to propose a new plan, and now, more than 40 years after police first called the civic center home, the voters will decide on a proposed bond measure that would fund an \$82 million, 148,000-square-foot police facility.

Hines argued that the consultants overestimated growth and pushed the idea that the city needed a much bigger facility than it actually did. Following the average rate of growth, he said, the department would only add 38 officers in the next 40 years. Making the new facility 75,000 square feet would triple the current amount of space and could be made for way less than \$82 million, allowing for seismic upgrades on the library and city hall.

He estimated the smaller facility and upgrades would leave \$22 million dollars for building bike lanes or helping the homeless.



A K9 unit storage area at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

"(The city) hired these high-priced consultants from Chicago," Hines said, referring to the DLR Group, a national architecture firm. "They've told us what we need and therefore we have to do it? Our argument is that local consultants said 75,000 square feet is fine."

At a public hearing, Salem police Chief Jerry Moore said the 75,000-square-foot estimate "was created by city employees so it's our fault that number is out there."

The department had no idea how much space it needed, Bellshaw said. Tripling the facility's current footprint seemed adequate, but experts speculated that with a 75,000-square-foot building, the department would immediately be at

capacity. Within 10 years, they'd be in the same spot they are now.

If the 148,000-square-foot facility is chosen, the proposed tax would result in a rate of 36 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, according to city officials. The estimated property tax for the bond for a \$200,000 home would be about \$72 per year.

Salem City Council [selected the 3.49-acre O'Brien site](#), a piece of property at Commercial and Division streets NE, as the location for the new police facility earlier this year. The proposed building would be home to a 911 call center, a crime lab, holding cells, 378 parking stalls, interview rooms and a community room.



The Salem Police Department on Tuesday, March 22, 2016. The facility was built in the 1970s and was quickly outgrown by the force; today the department is hoping to build a larger, more efficient office for police work.

(Photo: MOLLY J. SMITH / Statesman Journ)

Current Salem Police Department

- **Size: 26,641-square-feet**
- **Year opened: 1972**
- **Cost (of Civic Center): \$10 million**
- **Number of sworn officers: 190**
- **Civilian staff: 118**
- **Number of interview rooms: 3**
- **Square feet per sworn officer: 142.47**

Salem Can Do Better Proposed Facility

- **Size: 75,000-square-feet**
- **Cost: \$33 million**
- **Number of sworn officers: 190**
- **Civilian staff: 118**
- **Square feet per sworn officer: 394.73**



The men's locker room at the Salem Police Department facility at City Hall on Friday, Oct. 14, 2016.

(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Bond Measure Proposed Facility

- **Size: 148,000-square-feet**
- **Year to open: NA**
- **Cost: \$82 million**
- **Number of sworn officers: 190**
- **Civilian staff: 118**
- **Square feet per sworn officer: 778.95**



The entrance to the Keizer Civic Center, which houses city hall and the Keizer Police Department.
(Photo: MOLLY J. SMITH / Statesman Journal)

Keizer Police Department

- **Size: 28,080-square-feet**
- **Year opened: 2009**
- **Cost (of Civic Center): \$14.7 million**
- **Number of sworn officers: 35**
- **Civilian staff: 10**
- **Number of interview rooms: 7**
- **Square feet per sworn officer: 802.29**



The Eugene Police Department's current building was purchased by the city six years ago for \$10.2 million. Though an additional \$7 million in renovations were applied, there are still changes to the building, originally constructed in the 1980s, that could be made to update the facility.

(Photo: MOLLY J. SMITH / Statesman Journal)

Eugene Police Department

- **Size: 66,000-square-feet**
- **Year opened: 2012**
- **Cost: \$17.2 million**
- **Number of sworn officers: 186**
- **Civilian staff: 45**
- **Number of interview rooms: 5**
- **Square feet per sworn officer: 354.84**