

Salem residents have a second chance to fund police station



Janet Taylor (Photo: *Special to the Statesman Journal*)

The chance for do-over is rare, indeed. But life has just handed us an opportunity to make good on a pledge we made to the women and men in blue who risk their lives to protect us: the Salem police.

Frankly, we let them down with our first attempt to explain why Salem needs a state-of-the-art police headquarters to replace a relic of a facility plagued with serious deficiencies and risks to safety.

When an expanding circle of civic leaders asked us to co-chair an effort to inform and excite the community about a second effort at getting funding passed for a police station, we said yes immediately.

The reason is simple: In an era of cybercrime, domestic terrorism, school shootings and random mayhem across America, an investment in law enforcement for Oregon's state capital should not be optional. It falls into the realm of must-do, as would be the case for any seat of government in the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

Voters spoke last November when they objected to the cost and size of the initial project. In the aftermath came some serious post-mortem discussions about why those who opposed the plan were so successful in promoting half-truths and distortions to confuse voters. And supporters like us were forced to ask ourselves why we didn't respond with facts, expertise and a missing rationale for the cost and scope of the project.

But now that we have been blessed with a do-over, know that people of good faith who love this town are now on a mission.

With your support, we are all going to stand tall for Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore and build a home for law enforcement that will be the equal of its leadership.

Chief Moore, with good counsel from City Manager Steve Powers and city staff, arrived at a compromise for a 115,000 square foot facility that would cost taxpayers \$63.9 million. The City Council trimmed that further last week to \$61.8 million. If approved, property tax for the bonds on a home assessed at \$200,000 will be \$52 per year or \$4.33 per month.

Criminally inadequate is one way to describe that narrow, chopped-up, jerry-rigged workspace the police department has now. It has been so compromised over the decades that the original inhabitants would hardly recognize it.

Policing has evolved rapidly since the Civic Center campus was erected. Reality has changed for our women and men in blue, but their workspace has been held captive in the 1970s.

- Deputy Chief Steve Bellshaw said for lack of sufficient interview rooms, crime suspects routinely pass by witnesses who have willingly come in to give their stories. That's unimaginable, but true.
- It's so bad there aren't enough power plugs to charge the officers' radios. They have to juice them up at home.
- The compressed, claustrophobic men's locker room would be unacceptable for a middle-school gym class.
- For lack of space, the department is forced to store boxes of ammunition on the steps of a dimly-lit stairwell.
- Worse, our police station poses unacceptable security risks for the public and law enforcement. Bellshaw recently told us that a faulty crash-bar door allowed intruders to sneak in undetected.

But you need to know more.

- Officers paid for all of the workout equipment in their on-site gym. When the cable bill arrives each month for the small TV over the treadmill, they pay that, too.
- They also provided the money and sweat equity to decorate and furnish the quiet room where shaken families are taken following a trauma.
- The SWAT team had to build their own shelves — with their own money — to accommodate heavy gear, weapons and uniforms. The changing area is less than the width of a modest walk-in closet. It's so pinched for space that many officers undress outdoors.

It's simply unacceptable.

In the weeks leading to the May ballot, expect us to be out in the community explaining the growing needs and expectations of our police department and the benefits that will come with the new facility.

We are the Friends of Salem Police.

Law enforcement knows we are the kinds of friends who have their back.

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