

Second-try police bond measure still misses the mark

Having led the battle against the police facility plan which was rejected by voters last November, what Gerry Frank and Janet Taylor said in their Feb. 26 [guest opinion](#) were fighting words.

They wondered “why those who opposed the plan were so successful in promoting half-truths and distortions to confuse voters.”

Wrong. Salem Can Do Better put out accurate information about the drawbacks of the 148,000-square-foot, \$82 million proposal.

It’s unfortunate that the first communication from Friends of Salem Police in support of a second-try bond measure on the May ballot spoke falsely about why the original police facility plan failed.

It was too costly, too large and ignored the urgent need to make City Hall and the library earthquake-safe, just as a new police facility would be.

When I spoke against Measure 24-399, I’d say, “If it is important to save the lives of police department staff when the Big One earthquake hits by moving them out of City Hall into a seismically sound building, it is equally important to save the lives of everybody who works at or visits City Hall and the library.”

This argument resonated with voters. Such was confirmed by an online poll that was recently conducted by Salem Can Do Better.

Two-thirds of 394 respondents (66 percent) favored a Plan B for the police facility that included money for seismic upgrades to both the library and City Hall (52 percent) or just to the library (14 percent).

Hardly anybody in Salem denies the need for a new police facility. The space

currently occupied by the police department in City Hall is inadequate.

But until 2015, city officials planned to ask for money to seismically upgrade the Civic Center buildings in the same bond measure that would pay for a new police facility.

This still makes the most sense. Unfortunately, recently the four conservatives on the City Council blocked an attempt by the four progressives to consider a police facility plus library seismic retrofitting bond measure option.

I've semi-jokingly said we need a Friends of Children Who Will Be Crushed To Death At The Library.

I and others showed city officials how it would be easy to reduce unnecessary costs in the police facility budget by \$9 million, freeing up money to pay for library seismic upgrades.

Since this was rejected, I'm opposing the \$62 million standalone police facility plan because it is so important to assure that the library is earthquake-safe. It isn't good enough for the City Council to put a bond for library improvements on the November ballot.

This bond likely will compete with other expensive bond measures. And it sends the message that the lives of people who work at and visit the library aren't as important to save as the lives of police department employees.

Vote "no" on the May bond measure. Force city officials to stop making library-versus-police a false choice. A unified third-try bond will bring our community together.

Brian Hines of Salem is the head of Salem Can Do Better and a blogger. He can be reached at brianhines1@gmail.com.