

## **Students draft center's future**

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Beth Casper, reporter

Twenty-four University of Oregon architecture students took on a daunting task: design Salem's 1970s-era civic center campus as an icon for the city.

Two architecture studio classes were charged with designing a new building for Salem's police department and redesigning the civic center to be more navigable and accessible.

The task is one of 14 projects that students will help plan as part of the Sustainable City Year, a partnership this academic year between the University of Oregon and Salem in which a number of courses from across the university focus on assisting Salem with its sustainability goals and projects.

Last year, Salem City Council identified the need for a new police facility because the current building is about one-third the size that's needed, inadequate for meeting with the public and seismically unfit.

"They (police officers and staff) are just jammed in there everywhere," said Allen Dannen, Salem's project manager for the civic center redesign. "They do a good job of using every square inch that they have but it makes doing their job much more difficult."

An evaluation last year showed that the police department needed about 100,000 square feet, said Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore.

"And there are safety issues for the community involved," Moore said. "We bring prisoners from the jail and ride up the same elevator as people who need a permit to buy a house."

The police facility is in what would be considered the basement of the civic center -- an unsafe place if there was an earthquake, an event where police officers will be needed in the community.

Plus, day-to-day interactions with the public are difficult, Moore said.

"The department is not user friendly," he said. "It is hard for the community to find. There are no meeting rooms for community members and police to take care of business."

The City of Salem and two architecture firms, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects in Portland and Salem-based CB Two Architects, provided the students with the station's requirements -- rooms for lockers, evidence storage and criminal investigations, for example -- and ongoing support throughout the class.

"They opened the doors and looked at a wide range of ideas," said Garth Brandaw of CB Two Architects and a University of Oregon graduate. "There were 24 students in the studios, and no two ideas were similar."

The designs ranged from a 25-story tower to a building that wrapped around the west side of city hall. Most students designed the police facility in either Peace Plaza or the space between city hall and Mirror Pond. To connect the existing buildings with the new facility, students used similar shapes in their design and some students mimicked the concrete facade of city hall.

"Essentially we've been hired to explore the crazy options," said Josh Hilton, the adjunct instructor for the course. "The more designs and varied the locations, it is more for the design team to draw from."

That the students developed a design at all is testament to their energy and enthusiasm about the project.

They had a mere seven weeks to design their idea. And at 75,000 square feet, the police facility is one of the biggest buildings these architecture students have been asked to create.

They also had to work around existing buildings, such as the library, with a 40-year-old appearance.

"You want (the new police facility) to fit in in some respects but also pay respect to the existing buildings and layout," said Hilton. "There is any number of ways of doing that -- utilize forms or materials, or sometimes you go the other way and set off or highlight the existing buildings."

Open spaces, like Peace Plaza, couldn't just be filled in -- city staff asked that if an area is removed, it must be replaced.

In addition, the students incorporated sustainability into their design.

"It's about conserving natural resources and reducing waste and cost and electrical usage and, on the other hand, it is sustainability in a more community-oriented sense -- how to have it function now and 50 years from now," Hilton said.

Most students incorporated solar panels into their design, but some tried unique ideas, such as generating energy from a waterwheel in Mill Creek.

"A lot of them are thinking really hard about the public access to the facility and connecting with the larger community toward downtown and Riverfront Park," said the city's Dannen.

The students' final reviews were given in front of city staff, elected officials, architects from the two firms hired by the city and the chief of police.

"You can tell they are juiced," Hilton said about his students. "They really want to succeed in it because people might pick their design. When the police station does get designed and built, the students might go and say, 'They chose a piece of my design.'"

Now, the two architectural firms continue the design work started by the students and prepare several options for city councilors, who are looking into the possibility of a bond measure to support funding for the new public safety facility.

"We'll be weighing all of the ideas and pulling pieces and parts from the different projects," said Kirk Sund of CB Two Architects.

City staff expects the architects to offer several possible options by early spring.