

City council chooses police facility site



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The Salem City Council voted Monday night to pursue the O'Brien site as the location of a proposed police facility.

During a special meeting to [hear public testimony](#) on two finalist sites, councilors decided to [eliminate one of the options](#).

The council still needs to make final decisions on cost, size, design and funding source, which likely will be a bond on the November ballot. Although councilors have until August to file, City Attorney Dan Atchison said he'd like to write a ballot measure in July. Making the decision earlier would allow supporters to form a political action committee to begin campaigning sooner, he said.

Maureen Kenney, city spokeswoman, said the council would likely make final decisions in

April.

DHM Research will conduct a poll related to the police facility on behalf of the city March 10-13. An online community survey will run March 14-28, Kenney said.

Final analysis of the poll should be available for the March 28 council meeting, and the survey results should be ready in early April, she said.

More than two dozen potential sites had been narrowed to two: properties at the corner of Commercial and Division streets NE, known as the O'Brien site, and the block south of the Salem Public Library, called the Leslie site.

The estimated cost to build the full 150,000-square-foot facility consultants recommended is [\\$81.4 million](#), \$2 million more than it would have cost on the Leslie site.

During Monday's public hearing, no one testified in support of putting the police facility on the Leslie site.

The Leslie site [houses at least 17 businesses](#), the Oregon Commission for the Blind and homes that date back to the early 1900s.

Several business owners and residents on the Leslie site testified about the effects displacement would have on them.

The Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization, which represents the neighborhoods at both locations, supports putting the police facility on the O'Brien site. The South Central Association of Neighbors, which borders the Leslie site, has come out against putting the facility next door.

The O'Brien site was also recommended by state representatives Brian Clem and Paul Evans, a representative of Salem Public Library's three support boards and Salem Chamber of Commerce CEO Dan Clem.

TJ Sullivan, chairman of the blue-ribbon task force that began looking at the facility in 2014, said the council should quickly choose a site to dispel misinformation in the community — and that it should choose the O'Brien site, which was much less contentious.

The so-called O'Brien site is made up of [two former car dealerships and a vacant lot](#), all of which are for sale. It also includes the Mill Creek Plaza office building, which is not for sale.

Two dentists with offices at the Mill Creek Plaza gave impassioned pleas for changing the O'Brien design so it won't include the office building.

According to the consultants' plans, the Mill Creek Plaza would become a parking lot for the facility.

Together, Richard Pfau and Holly Chamberlain serve 4,000 patients, Chamberlain said.

"This is not a small building with a couple of dentists," she said.

Several councilors said that until reading about it in the Statesman Journal and hearing the dentists' testimony, they hadn't realized the office building was included in the site.

Councilman Chuck Bennett, who represents the [neighborhoods at both sites](#), said he wasn't aware the plaza would be included and apologized the council didn't know about this "vital service."

"Can we redesign this slightly to design around them so that they are able to continue being there and not turn it into a surface parking lot?" he asked.

Councilwoman Diana Dickey said she appreciated hearing testimony about how the decisions would affect people, calling the dentists' testimony "compelling."

Bennett made the motion to pursue O'Brien. With Councilman Warren Bednarz abstaining because of a conflict of interest, and Councilman Jim Lewis absent, the motion passed 7-0.

"It's just clear to me the Leslie site is just absolutely not going to work. It just has no kind of support," Bennett said.

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