

Council passes next step for new police facility



Whitney M. Woodworth, Statesman Journal

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(Photo: Statesman Journal / file)

After years of deliberation, polls and public hearings, Salem City Council unanimously passed a motion to direct city staff to create a resolution for the proposed \$82 million police facility following a public hearing Wednesday.

Many members of the public used the meeting as a chance to urge council to move forward and put the bond measure on the November ballot before constructions costs increased and the city council changed.

"I think it is very much time to move forward," resident Kasia Quillinan said. "Stop dithering around."

Council seemed to take the requests for action to heart. With Councilman Chuck Bennett absent, the motion to draft a resolution passed 8-0. Mayor Anna Peterson also 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 also passed unanimously.

The city will have a resolution for the police facility prepared by the next city council meeting. Council will consider the adoption of the resolution on June 27. The bond resolution will need to be sent to the county clerk no later than August 8.

Most of the 28 people at the hearing spoke in favor of the proposed \$82 million police facility, but others were concerned about the project's cost and the lack of seismic upgrades to city hall.

"We need to be sure we build a police facility we will not outgrow," resident Laura Morett said.

Morett was dismayed after visiting the current facility and seeing the cramped quarters.

"I was ashamed and embarrassed by the conditions the officers have to work in," she said.

Others placed priority on the need for seismic upgrades, not just for the new police facility but also for the city hall and library. If a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake strikes, the city could be asked "Why did you do nothing?" during the aftermath, said resident Brian Hines. City staff, residents and library visitors will be at risk, and seismic upgrades seemed to have been overlooked, he added.

"You know it's coming and you're not doing anything about it," Hines said, referring to the large-scale earthquake that threatens the region.

A poll conducted in March found about 58 percent of Salem residents would support the bond measure to build a new police facility.

"The public is split," said John Horvick, vice president of DHM Research, the firm that conducted the poll.

Horvick spoke before Salem City Council on June 1 and elaborated on the results.

One thing that stood out, he said, is that an overwhelming percent of residents— about 90 percent— are very satisfied with the city's police and public safety.

The Salem Police Department receives a great deal of support, and Chief Jerry Moore said he has yet to hear anyone deny they need an updated facility. At the current police headquarters on the first floor of the Vern Miller Civic Center, 187 sworn officers crowd into cubicles, victims pass perpetrators in the halls, privacy is scarce and large-scale earthquake would render the facility inaccessible. The crime lab and 9-1-1 dispatch center are housed off-site in a leased space.

"The need is not in question, just the solution," said assistant city engineer Allen Dannen.

More specifically the cost size and cost of facility that would fit the needs of the city for decades to come.

If the full 150,000-square-foot facility is chosen, homeowners with assessed property values of \$200,000 would pay \$9.08 a month, or just under \$109 a year, in property taxes, according to city officials.

Susann Kaltwasser, of Salem Community Vision, referenced other police facilities in Seattle and Multnomah County that cost only about \$30 million.

“They know something that doesn’t seem to have been presented to you,” Kaltwasser said, referring to those behind the other, cheaper facilities.

In February, Salem City Council selected the O'Brien site (/story/news/2016/03/01/city-council-unanimously-chooses-police-facility-site/81141048/), a piece of property located at corner of Commercial and Division streets NE, as the location for the new police facility.

Recent Salem City Council discussions have centered around the whether or not to include the Willamette Valley Communications Center, the emergency dispatch for Salem police and more than 25 surrounding agencies, in the new facility. Leaving the center out would save about \$11.5 million from the total cost. The current building lacks security and centralization, Moore said. 911 services will outgrow the facility within 10 years. Incorporating a dispatch center in the new facility will save city resident in the long run.

"If you decide to build it standalone or later in the future, the costs go up," Dannen said.

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