

## Council hears from public on police facility



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City Council holds special meeting on proposed police facility sites

When it comes to choosing a site for the proposed Salem police facility, a consensus started to emerge Monday night at the city council's public hearing: Build it on the O'Brien site.

The city council narrowed down the possible site of the building to property 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.

Based on recommendations from consultants who have built police facilities throughout the country, the council is considering a 150,000-square-foot station for \$81.4 million or \$79.4 million, depending on which site it's built on.

Divisions in the community became clear when it came to the size and cost of the facility.

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.

Sullivan called the Leslie site "extremely contentious."

In order to build the right-sized facility, the council needs to choose the site with the least contention, the O'Brien site, he said.

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.

The Leslie site, just south of Salem Public Library, houses at least 17 businesses, the Oregon Commission for the Blind, and homes that date back to the early 1900s.

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, Salem Public Library's three support boards, Salem Chamber of Commerce Dan Clem and residents and business owners who would be displaced if the Leslie site was chosen.

Dentists Richard Pfau and Holly Chamberlain, who have offices in the Mill Creek Plaza, asked the council to consider changing the design of the O'Brien site so their building wouldn't be destroyed.

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

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

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

The council was willing to consider building the site on the much smaller site at Leslie, so why not consider building it on a smaller O'Brien site, Pfau asked.



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**Jean Mateson, far left, speaks on behalf of herself and other small business owners behind her during a special city council meeting on the proposed sites for the new Salem Police Department facility at the Vern Civic Center in downtown Salem on Monday, Feb. 29, 2016. "The impact of having to relocate would be devastating for our businesses," Mateson said. (Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)**

Several members of Salem Community Vision spoke in support of their alternative plan, which would include \$30 million for the police facility at the O'Brien site and \$20 million for seismic improvements for the Vern Civic Center, site of city hall, municipal court and the library.

Other residents also spoke to the need for seismically upgrading the library and civic center.

Several residents urged the council to rely on the knowledge of the experts they've hired to help them make this decision.

On behalf of the city council, Dan Clem said the council should use the data and advice provided by the professionals and plan for the police force to grow to keep pace with the population and economy.

Salem resident Dan Wellert said it would be a mistake to not take seriously the advice of the nationwide experts that have hired. He said he thinks if the community were able to better understand what the police force does, they'd come behind the bond.

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