

Small Business, Renters and Homeowners Will Pay the Price for a New Police Station

I Stand Proud and watch from “Atop” the Great Dome of the Oregon State Capitol. It is my job to watch and remember. Last November



MUSINGS OF THE OREGON PIONEER

8, the voters turned down a new \$82 million dollar police station at the site of the former O'Brien/DeLon auto dealership on Division Street between Liberty Street and Commercial NE, abutting Mill Creek on the north. There was no organized opposition to the bond levy. The bond levy was supported by the Chamber of Commerce and was expected to win by 60% of the vote. My ears are still “burning”. There are several conversations I wish to report on.

The first is that two Salem City Counselors, while making the political rounds speaking in support of the new police station bond issue levy, said there was “No Plan B” if the bond issue failed. Well that was not quite right, as there is a “Plan B”. It seems the City Council, which is also the governing body for the Downtown Urban Renewal Agency has been talking to itself. The Downtown Urban Renewal Agency is now considering the purchase of the former auto dealership property for the City of Salem. Is that legal? I really don't know, but I suspect it is. So “Plan B” is now being considered. The City Council, if “Plan B” continues in its present form, will hold another election in May 2017. The price tag is expected to be \$82 million again. One might expect organized opposition for the

next round, so stay tuned.

The second conversation is from several longtime Salem-ites. It seems that the auto dealership site was built on fill dirt. They expressed concerns at the concept of building a 150,000 square foot building on fill. As one would expect several City Councilors disregard such inquires as unjustified criticism of the need for a NEW police station. The fiasco associated with Marion County's Courthouse Square project comes to mind, but who's listening? I do wonder!

The third conversation is among apartment owners and developers of apartment complexes. The word on the street is clear. If the bond levy passes in May, rental and lease rates will go up to offset the cost of increased property taxes. Let there be no misunderstanding. The cost of property tax increases will fall on small businesses, residential renters and homeowners. Large businesses will most likely pass the costs of increased property tax levies on to their customers.

The City Council is driving the bus, but they seem to be looking for a train to run into. Salem cannot continue to increase property taxes via bond levies. The problem of homelessness and the loss of small businesses will get worse with increased property taxes. There is no question the police need additional space. But for goodness sake, be reasonable and tax effective by remodeling existing commercial space in a sustainable manner. I Stand Proud and watch from “Atop” the Great Dome of the Oregon State Capitol. It is my job to watch and remember.