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May 26, 2015

TO: Mayor and Salem City Council

RE: Need for seismic retrofitting of City Hall and Library

Regarding the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Police Facility to delay seismic retrofitting of the Civic Center buildings — City Hall, Library, parking structures — *this is a really bad idea.*

I urge you to return to the original plan by City officials: to both build a new police facility and seismically retrofit City Hall and the Library. There is no reason to delay making essential preparations for the Big One earthquake that is a matter of when, not if.

Consider the chart **next to the Earthquake Timing section** of the Wikipedia article about the Cascadia Subduction Zone. The intervals before six "Big One" earthquakes have been studied, the most recent one being in 1700 -- 315 years ago.

Here's the intervals for three of the six: 201 years, 250 years, 330 years. We're now at 315 years since the last Big One.

Why would City officials put off seismic strengthening of City Hall and the Library when the next super-devastating earthquake to hit the Pacific Northwest could strike at any moment?

Check out [the OPB site, Aftershock](#). It says, "A magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the Pacific Northwest coast could hit at any time. Enter your location above for a custom report on your seismic risks and how to prepare."

When I put in the address for City Hall, I found that the Intensity rating for this location is 5/6. By contrast, several Salem friends and I put in our home addresses and got 4/6. The higher earthquake risk for the Civic Center probably is due to a 3/4 rating for Ground Deformation, something that didn't appear on our home risk reports.

The Aftershock site says about a 9.0 quake hitting the City Hall area:

The quake causes soils here to turn liquid, like wet sand. Underground pipes are damaged and evacuation routes could be compromised. Nearby houses are damaged, and the ground is permanently deformed. Rebuilding here will be difficult.

A May 22 news release from the City of Salem says, "While the entire civic center campus needs seismic improvements, the task force recommended that the police station should be the priority. Police occupy cramped quarters on the civic center's bottom floor."

So apparently saving the lives of police department staff is viewed as more important than saving the lives of other Civic Center employees, along with the lives of visitors to City Hall and the Library, which could include children enjoying Storytime at the Library when the devastating Big One earthquake hits.

If it is unthinkable that the police department be reduced to rubble when the Civic Center "pancakes" after a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, why isn't it equally unthinkable to allow other City of Salem departments, along with the Library, to suffer the same fate?

All City agencies, not just the police department, will be needed to function after a massive earthquake. Panicked citizens should be able to count on the Civic Center as a haven where disaster relief and emergency help are coordinated.

It makes no sense to allow the Civic Center to become rubble, rather than a refuge, a stable place in a ravaged community. The OPB report, based on the best available data and expert opinion, projects that restoring water and sewer services, and partial restoration of top priority highways, will take more than a year after the Big One earthquake hits.

Civic Center staff and facilities need to be part of the recovery efforts, not buried under a collapsed City Hall and Library. Please, make seismic retrofitting of the Civic Center a priority, not an afterthought.

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