

# Task force urges new Salem police station



Brandon Southward, Statesman Journal 10:36 p.m. PDT May 18, 2015



(Photo: ASHLEY SMITH / Statesman Journal file)

A task force created by Salem Mayor Anna Peterson is suggesting the city quickly build a new \$50 million police station, but move it away from its current home in the Vern Miller Civic Center. The task force also suggests delaying seismic reinforcement work on the civic center.

In 2013, the city's plans for a massive upgrade to the civic center, at a price tag of about \$80.5 million, was met with resistance from Salem taxpayers.

Now the task force is calling to build a new public safety facility that would serve as a police station and emergency dispatch center. The idea to keep the new public safety facility from the original plans stems from a sense of urgency, according to the task force.

Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore pointed out that the need for a new facility for the police hasn't been an overnight thing.

"About 15 years ago we began to see problems arise with the facility and there have been discussions about a new facility for a while now."

The Salem police station is indeed small compared with its counterparts. Keizer has 37 sworn officers and about nine support staff operating out of a 28,080 square-foot police station. Salem has 187 sworn officers and 100 civilian employees and operates in a space nearly the same size as Keizer's.

"We need a new police facility. We need it built well, and we need to build it now," said T.J. Sullivan, a former city councilor and owner of a Salem insurance firm, who is chairman of the task force.



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The suggestion to move the new police facility away from the civic center is a change from original plans. Some task force members were concerned with the possible cost of underground parking that would be needed for police vehicles at the civic center, a loss of open space, and unwanted changes or alterations to the Mirror Pond.

Another change for the task force was the size of the new facility.

The total cost a facility of that size, including elements such as purchasing land, design costs, equipment and furnishings would be in the ballpark of \$50 million.

The task discussed a \$50 million bond that's payable over 25 years to finance the public safety facility.

If voters approved a \$50 million bond measure, Salem taxpayers would pay approximately 32 cents per \$1,000 assessed value. This means a house valued at \$200,000 would pay an annual assessment of \$63.35.

As for the other improvements, including fixing seismic problems and \$22 million in deferred maintenance at Vern Miller Civic Center, the message was clear: First the public safety facility then the focus will turn toward the much needed improvements.

And the belief is by splitting the public facility from the other improvements voters will get a better understanding of both issues.

To highlight that point Chief Moore pointed to previous failed measures in Salem's history.

"The history of bond measures in Salem is when the issues are mixed or jammed together they fail."

Mayor Anna Peterson insisted that the campaign to get the public on their side for the new facility is a much stronger public campaign.

"Once the council adopts the report the council will put together a campaign committee and we will be aggressive in inviting people into the current facility and (show why) a new one is needed, we will be using social networks, and get other groups like the (Salem Area) Chamber (of Commerce) involved as well."

Sullivan said that once people learn of the issue they become more receptive to the plan.

"When people learn about it (the public safety facility plans) the more they are for it."

The task force's report will soon be presented to the Salem City Council . The hope is to have a bond measure on the ballot for fall 2016.

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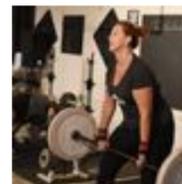
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