

## Historic quality of downtown spared with new building site

■ *Letters and e-mail give voice to residents' opposition of downtown building site*

By Brian Goodell  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Pressures from community members and Congressman Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., have prompted the Eugene City Council to support the development of a \$70 million federal courthouse in place of city hall, rather than the more controversial site next to the Fifth Street Public Market.

At an impromptu Thursday night meeting, the council also formed a committee to recommend a plan for relocating current city hall operations to a new location should the city hall site be adopted. According to DeFazio, the General Services Administration, the federal agency that initially chose the Fifth Avenue site, is anxious for the committee to begin its analysis.

"The council considers this a win-win situation," City Communications Director Phil Weiler said. "They saw this as an opportunity to get out of a building that is too small and would crumble in an earthquake."

In addition, the GSA will avoid public scrutiny for dropping a gigantic, 10-story federal courthouse in the middle of downtown Eugene's commercial district next to the Fifth Street Public Market. DeFazio's office and the City Manager's office received several hundred letters and e-mail messages from Eugene residents voicing their disdain for the GSA's original proposed site.

"The character of downtown Eugene is important to residents and visitors," University employee Kim Mangun wrote in one of several hundred letters sent to Mayor Jim Torrey. "Residents appreciate the

quaint and historic nature of the area, and visitors bring in much-needed revenue to Station Square, Fifth Street Public Market and the Pearl District. What a shame it would be to erect such an enormous building that would overshadow the rest of downtown."

However, no official site has been chosen. According to a Sept. 23 Register-Guard article, Jay Pearson, the regional administrator of the GSA, said his decision was final last week and came after considering comments from two public meetings and a year-long analysis of three downtown sites.

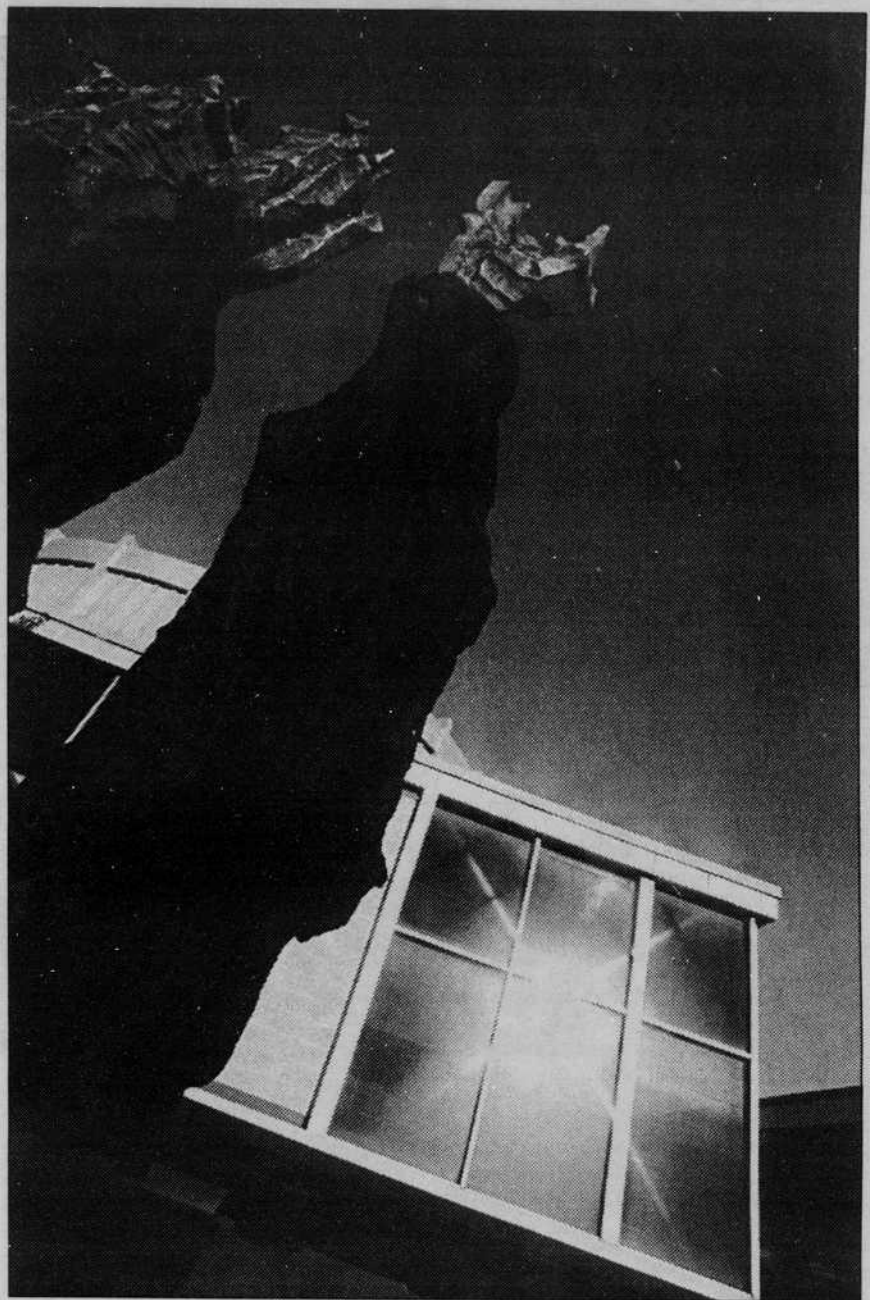
But in a telephone conversation on Friday, DeFazio informed Torrey that the GSA is reconsidering its site selection for the new federal courthouse.

"The GSA's original decision was based on what they thought was in the public's best interest," Weiler said. "So there's no reason why they wouldn't reconsider putting a 10-story building on Fifth Avenue. It would wipe out all surface lot parking, block out the sun and change the overall feel of that part of town."

The tally of the council's vote was six to one, with Councilor Gary Rayer as the lone opposition vote. According to the motion, the council agreed that the Fifth Avenue site presents significant challenges of scale, compatibility and neighborhood impact.

Weiler said the council also took into consideration the need for a new city hall. However, their concerns did not appear in the text of the motion.

"When city hall was built 35 years ago, building codes were different than they are now," Weiler said. "Back then, people didn't know that the Willamette Valley had earthquakes."



Jeffrey Stockton/Emerald

The proposed site for the new federal building is now City Hall, located downtown on 7th Avenue E.

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