

Squirrely

City raids its \$29 million stash for cop shop that voters rejected.

Eugene voters have twice rejected paying for a big new police station, the last time by nearly a two-to-one margin.

But city officials still want the big new cop shop. They've secretly squirreled away a staggering \$29 million by diverting money from city services to fund the unpopular project. With the \$29 million in buried nuts, a sharply divided council decided Monday to ask voters in November for an additional \$7 million to complete the \$36 million police project.

"I think the measure will lose," says David Kelly, one of three councilors who voted against the financing package.

There's a lot of things going against the police proposal. Voters may resent the city hoarding of taxpayer dollars for the cop shop, be disgusted with police after sex crimes by

officers, think the building is too big and may look at the police station as a costly three-time loser.

But supporters say the relatively small tax increase made possible by the city stash and the support of non-profits who police say they'll give space to in the new building could push the measure over the top.

The conservative council majority and city staff act like the \$29 million they've squirreled away is there's to do with as they see fit.

money, not ours."

The city piled up the \$29 million from scrapping money from city services for the last four years (\$11.4 million) and through years of phone and cable taxes and fees (\$16.2 million). The city has another \$750,000 diverted by the downtown urban renewal district plus \$750,000 in accumulated interest on its cash hoard.

Howard Bonnett, a former chairman of Eugene's citizen Budget Committee, says he's "surprised" at the size of the building reserve the city has diverted from city services.

Bonnett says he wonders which citizen services the city had to cut or not fund to accumulate that much money. "What are they doing?"

leverage a bigger bond vote for a new City Hall later. "It's shortsighted," she says. "I do hope this measure fails at the ballot."

Spending the \$16 million in telecom funds on an unpopular police station could also prejudice a vote on whether to continue those taxes.

Bonnett wonders whether the city shouldn't be saving the \$29 million to pay off millions of dollars in lawsuits from the more than a dozen sex crime victims of officers Roger Magaña and Juan Lara.

"It seems sort of shortsighted to build a police station instead of using that money for the problems the police have generated," Bonnett says.

The Magaña and Lara scandals could

'It seems sort of shortsighted to build a police station instead of using that money for the problems the police have generated.'

— Howard Bonnett, former Budget Committee chair

But Councilor Betty Taylor says the council should get voter approval before spending the \$29 million in internal money. "It's their

Even supposed "one-time" funding the city has acquired can "clearly" be amortized over many years to provide funding for ongoing services, Bonnett notes.

"They're taking money away from providing services," Bonnett says. "I don't think they should be doing that."

cripple efforts to pass the bond measure.

"Let's face it, there are some police department perceptions in the community," says Councilor Kelly.

Mayor Jim Torrey admits the scandals had a "tremendously negative impact" on the public reputation of the EPD, but he argues the police still need a new building.

At a time when the public is calling for more police oversight, the city shouldn't put the police away in a separate building, some argue. Councilor Bettman says the citizens want a combined police station and City Hall.

Bonnett notes that even before Magaña and Lara, the police station failed repeatedly while youth, library, school and parks measures passed. "There's a reason why it hasn't been approved," he says. "They have a credibility problem."

Councilor Taylor says putting the station on the ballot a third time will only solidify resistance. Already, she says, people in her generally pro-tax ward have told her, "You already did that two times."

THIRD TIME AROUND

But supporters say the police station will pass on its third try.

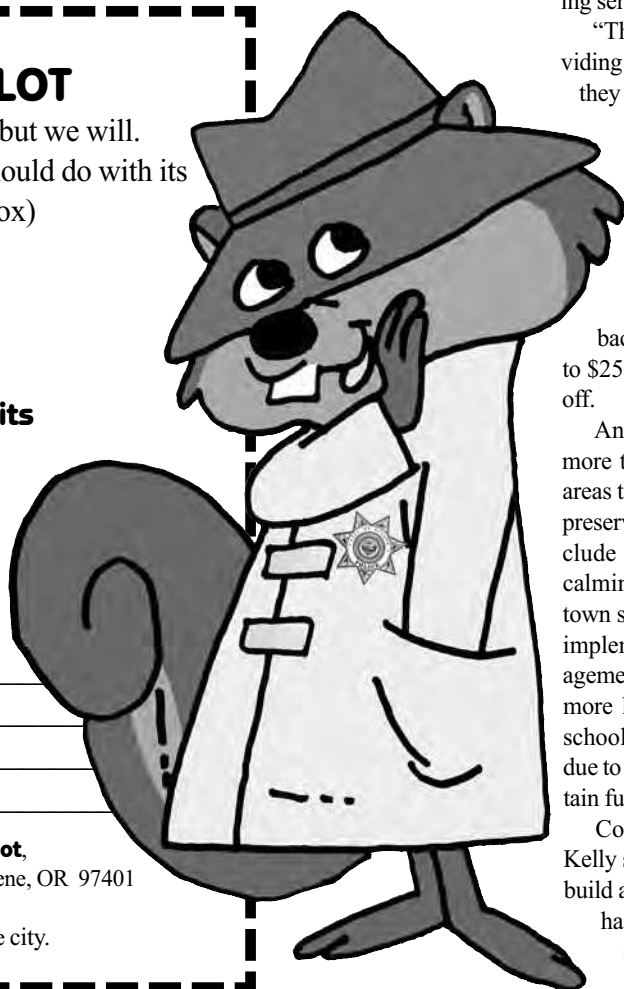
By using the squirreled \$29 million for just the police station, the bond measure can be kept relatively small and more palatable to voters, council conservatives argue. The \$6.8 million will increase property taxes for the average homeowner a total of about \$200 over the next 20 years.

SQUIRRELY BALLOT

The city wasn't going to ask, but we will. What do you think Eugene should do with its \$29 million hoard? (Check Box)

- Police Station
 - Fix Potholes
 - Refund Taxpayers
 - Pay Off Police Lawsuits
 - Buy Parkland
 - Community Policing
 - School Support
 - Run Library
- Fill in the Blank:

Mail your responses to **Squirrely Ballot**, Eugene Weekly, 1251 Lincoln St., Eugene, OR 97401 or email to editor@eugeneweekly.com We'll publish the results for you and the city.



TOP PRIORITY?

A host of other city needs could use the millions the city has squirreled away.

The city claims it has a \$90 million backlog in street repairs that will explode to \$250 million in the next decade if it is put off.

Another city study found the city has more than \$40 million in threatened natural areas that could be lost to development if not preserved as parkland. Other unmet needs include funding community policing, traffic calming, a homeless shelter, a new downtown swimming pool, and money to actually implement Eugene's adopted growth management and nodal development plans for a more livable, greener city. City library and school support property tax levies are also due to expire in coming years and face uncertain futures.

Councilors Bonny Bettman and David Kelly say they want to use the \$29 million to build a combined police station and new city hall a couple years from now. Bettman says that spending all the \$29 million now will leave no internal money to

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