

City Hall Sprawl

City disses its own goals and rules and heads for the burbs

While trying to convince developers to build downtown with sustainability arguments and big subsidies, the city is arguing that building downtown doesn't make sense when it comes to its own plans to move a big chunk of City Hall to the suburbs.

The city's arguments against downtown criticize its own regulations and fly in the face of decades of city policy and plans to promote cost efficient, environmentally friendly and livable compact development over urban sprawl.

The city plans to move its police patrol function, which now occupies about half of the City Hall, to vacant industrial land west of Chambers Street.

From a staff report given to the City Council last month, here's the city's arguments against building downtown:

- "Sites require structured parking."
- "Structured parking will likely need to be underground due to a city planning requirement that 50 percent of ground floor parking structures fronting the street house retail or office functions."

While many of the city's arguments against downtown are economic, they are contradicted by the city's own actual cost estimates.

- "Sites require a minimum floor-to-site area ratio that will be challenging to meet."
 - Smaller sites require "multiple floors of building and parking (more expensive for structure, elevators, and stairs)."
 - "Land costs for downtown were double that of land outside of downtown."
- Here are the arguments for suburban sites:
- "More flexibility for potential expansion or reorganized plan due to larger site sizes."
 - "Greater potential for less expensive surface parking and accommodation of personally owned vehicles."
 - "Good surveillance of perimeter and protection of facilities due to site sizes."
 - "Less expensive land and construction costs."

At the same time the city is arguing against downtown for much of City Hall, it's pushing a subsidy of \$50 million or more for Portland developers to build downtown.

While many of the city's arguments against downtown are economic, they are contradicted by the city's own actual cost estimates. An outskirts police location would cost about \$30.7 million including surface parking for personal vehicles; a downtown site would cost only \$30.4 million with abundant personal parking available in adjacent city garages. An outskirts site will also cost the city more in road and utility infrastructure and more in paying police to drive to and from City Hall and the courts.

Moving most of the police out of down-

town could also worsen the perception of developers and merchants that downtown is unsafe.

Another major concern is that if most police officers move to the suburbs, they'll be far away from the supervision of the police chief and city manager who plan to keep their offices at City Hall downtown. The city has already undergone harsh criticism for failing to supervise officers who were out raping and sexually abusing women for years. City consultants investigating the scandal also faulted Eugene police for a separate "culture" apart from the morals of city government or citizens.

But Mayor Kitty Piercy, almost the entire City Council and city staff oppose a downtown site for the police.

Piercy argues that the chief and city manager will be able to remotely supervise police. "I assume they will have exactly the same supervision."

Though large swaths of downtown are surface lots, pits or underutilized, Piercy argues that putting police patrol downtown with their need for cruiser parking "is not the best use of expensive downtown property."

Patrol officers are "steered and dedicated wherever the needs are" and don't have to be located downtown to provide safety there, Piercy said.

But locating new police facilities in high-crime areas is a common practice for cities. The city's own report acknowledges the "positive impact" on safety from a nearby police facility.

Councilor Bonny Bettman said the police should stay with City Hall downtown. To properly supervise the police and integrate the police culture with the city, "we should have police along with the rest of the city government services," she said.

Bettman also said moving half of City Hall to the suburbs flies in the face of the city's goals for fighting sprawl with greener building downtown that reduces traffic. "The aversion to building denser in the urban core is the antithesis of sustainability," she said.

Councilor Betty Taylor said that rather than building a big, expensive police facility, the city should have officers take their cruisers home and/or move to a scattered precinct model that works better for community policing.

Voters have defeated similarly priced new police buildings three times at the ballot box. But the city continues to pursue the building.

Councilors and city managers have said they may try to avoid a bond measure vote by instead paying for the edifice by spending the city's entire facility reserve on the police building. After the failed building measures, the city amassed a facility reserve of about \$30 million by taxing citizens and then squirreling away the money rather than providing city services.

But Bettman said voters will see through the scheme and revolt by refusing to pass a later bond measure the city plans for a new City Hall. "All of these general fund services have basically sacrificed to building a police station," Bettman said. "A bond measure will never pass at this point."

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