

City Hall Design

Project cost grows while popularity shrinks

With a new Eugene City Hall shrinking in popularity despite more than \$2 million spent on design and PR work, Mayor Kitty Piercy says she's glad the big building won't be up for a vote anytime soon.

"Holding off for a while on the City Hall makes good sense," Piercy said of the council's recent decision to delay a City Hall vote until at least 2010. "We have some work to do."

City architects have fleshed out the design of the new building and its price tag, which is now up to \$188 million.

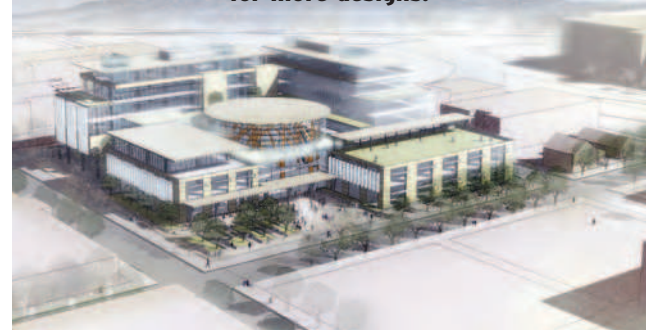
While the cost continues to escalate, public support for the new city offices is dropping. Only 41 percent support a property tax increase for a \$155 million City Hall, according to a November city survey. That's down from 43 percent support in a May survey. The survey consultant said 60 percent support was needed in such an early tax measure poll for a good chance of success.

The survey found such low support for a new City Hall despite a survey question pushing voters with positive arguments for the building. The survey of 401 likely voters was conducted Nov. 14-18 and had a margin of error of 5 percent.

The city's Portland architecture team from Thomas Hacker, Inc. unveiled a flat-

roofed, glass and steel design up to six stories with a large atrium, exterior louvers, a water feature and small entry plaza. The building could include green building features such as active and passive solar elements, green roofs, rainwater recovery and ample bike parking. A less green 200-car garage would

Eugene draft City Hall design by Thomas Hacker Architects of Portland. Check www.eugeneweekly.com for more designs.



be built on one level under the building.

Several councilors said the design should do more to reflect Eugene.

"I prefer a much more Northwest feel," with wood instead of "steel and glass," Councilor Bonny Bettman said.

With more wood and peaked roofs, Councilor Alan Zelenka said, "you would say that's a Northwest building as opposed to something built in Kansas."

Councilors preferred an embedded council chamber rather than a proposed cylindrical structure on the plaza that some compared to a lumber mill "wigwam burner."

Landscape consultant Doug Macy said the city could avoid planting "precious" large trees around the building to avoid "people tying themselves to trees in protest to expanding the building." No mention was made of preserving any of the large trees now growing around and through the current City Hall.

Bettman said the staff and council majority's decision to move most police officers out of City Hall to a \$25 million suburban-style building near 2nd and Chambers will hurt voter support. She pointed out a separate police headquarters has already failed three times at the polls.

The new suburban design will be even more controversial, according to Bettman. "It's a sprawl model" that "flies in the face of all our growth management principals," Bettman said. The suburban building with big surface lots is "contrary to sustainability in every way" and will "cancel out any benefit we get" from building a green City Hall downtown, she said.

City executive Jim Carlson suggested

recently that the city could avoid another vote on the police building by dedicating all of its large existing facility reserve to the police rather than to a City Hall downtown.

Councilor Zelenka said he favored moving police out of downtown to save having to build a parking garage. But he said, "I'm not really interested in building a new patrol facility without a new City Hall."

Despite its suburban location, the police building would actually cost more per square foot than the City Hall downtown, consultants estimate. The police building comes in at \$742 per square foot compared to \$629 per square foot for the City Hall building. By comparison, a 1,200 sq. ft. home built at the same square-foot-cost as the police building would cost \$890,000 to build.

With escalating costs and dropping support, some councilors are looking for other options. Councilors Betty Taylor and Bettman and Mayor Piercy suggested a re-examination of building City Hall in the Sears pit across from the library now that a development proposal for the site has fallen through.

City staff suggested a smaller, \$154 million City Hall design. But that could include the city spending \$7 million to renovate part of the adjacent Federal Building and then paying rent.

With a new City Hall growing more distant, Councilor Taylor said the city should fix up the dirty, chipping paint and rip off the useless, jail-like bars on the existing facility. "My choice is this building." **EW**

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