

CITY TO BUILD COP SHOP DESPITE NO VOTES

Facing huge cuts in city services due to the recession, the Eugene City Council voted unanimously Feb. 11 to spend at least \$17 million in city reserves on a new police station that voters opposed three times.

Keeping the reserves from being used to prevent more than \$10 million in cuts to popular library, parks, Hult Center, planning, community policing and other services appears to be a primary motivation for the city manager and councilors.

"It really can't be on the table as part of the budget committee discussion," said Councilor Chris Pryor. "We need to make sure it goes for this."

Three south Eugene councilors and Mayor Kitty Piercy had expressed concerns about the budget maneuver earlier. But including up to \$5 million in the proposal for a seismic and mechanical upgrade of the City Hall building was apparently enough to win over their support.

Though all of the councilors and city staff may support prioritizing the police station above other city services, voters do not. Police station measures failed in May and November 2000 and again in 2004. The last margin was 60 percent opposed.

City Manager Jon Ruiz recommended that the council get around the will of the voters on the police station and spend its reserves on the unpopular facility without asking voters. Voter approval is "unlikely in the foreseeable future," he wrote in a memo.

The City Council also voted unanimously to pursue using the EWEB headquarters building along the Willamette River for a new City Hall. Dislocating EWEB would move hundreds of employees out of downtown at a time the city is spending millions of dollars on tax breaks and subsidies to retain employers in the city's struggling downtown. — *Alan Pittman*

HOUSING CRISIS HITS HOME

How bad has the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression hit Eugene?

Eugene average home prices fell 8 percent in the last year, according to the Zillow.com website.

It could be a lot worse. U.S. home values fell 12 percent in 2008, according to Zillow. In Bend, values dropped 18 percent.

Even after the drop in Eugene, local home prices are still up 6 percent over the past five years due to earlier sharp increases. Eugene home prices peaked in the second quarter of 2007 at a median price of almost \$250,000. Now they've fallen almost 14 percent from that peak, erasing three years of earlier gains.

Almost a third of all Eugene homes bought in 2008 had negative equity last year with the owners owing more than they could sell the home for. That was down from almost 40 percent the year before, apparently in part due to banks demanding bigger down payments.

In the past year, 13 percent of Eugene homes sold for a loss. Foreclosures were almost 7 percent of sales, triple the average rate for the past five years, according to Zillow.

With the demand for homes dropping, home construction in Eugene has dropped in half, according to city permit data. In the six months ending in Feb. 12, 48 homes were built in Eugene, half as many compared to the same period a year before.

But although home construction has dropped in half, the overall valuation of construction projects in Eugene is down only by about one-fourth. A few high value apartment and commercial projects helped keep the overall construction volume up, according to permit data.

The state unemployment rate is 8.8 percent, the national rate 7.1 percent. The Lane County unemployment rate has climbed from 5.3 percent two years ago to 9.5 percent last month, according to state data. That's almost the record 10 percent December unemployment rate for Lane County set in 1984. — *Alan Pittman*

GODLESS EUGENE

Going to church on Sunday? Most people in Oregon and Eugene aren't.

Oregon ranked as one of the least religious states in the nation in a Gallop poll released this month. The poll asked, "Is religion an important part of your daily life?" Nationally, 65 percent said yes. In Oregon the percentage was 53.

Nationally, only 30 percent told Gallup that they go to church at least once a week.

Only one in four people in Eugene are counted in church congregations, half the national average, according to a 2000 national study by the Glenmary missionary group.

The study ranked the Eugene/Springfield metro area as one of the very least religious places in the nation. Out of 276 metro areas, Eugene ranked 273 for the lowest percentage of adherents.

So does this mean Eugene is going to hell? Well, Denmark ranks as one of the least religious nations in the world but was featured last year on *60 Minutes* as one of the world's most livable and happiest. — *Alan Pittman*

news Briefs



Daniel
HoSang

HELICOPTER PESTICIDE SPRAYING IN EUGENE

Fearing an infestation of gypsy moths, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is proposing to use helicopters to spray the biological insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk) over 626 acres centered around Old Dillard Road in Eugene.

The ODA says the spraying is safe and necessary, but Eugene's Oregon Toxics Alliance (OTA) sent out an email saying the aerial insecticide is not safe for people and the environment. OTA is urging Eugene residents to "step forward to protect our community from exposure and harm" from the proposed aerial spraying.

"The government has found only seven moths from traps they have set in south Eugene," says OTA in the email to its mailing list. "The results of the trapping project do not indicate that Eugene has 'an outbreak' that requires pesticide treatment."

OTA says aerial spraying of insecticides to control the gypsy moth is not necessary and "is likely to result in pesticide drift that can contaminate properties and gardens and harm people outside of the target area."

Similar aerial sprays for moths have been abandoned in California due to health concerns and replaced by a program of sterile moth releases, according to OTA.

OTA says the insecticide will kill monarch butterflies, swallowtail butterflies and many other beneficial insects. And this particular pesticide, "delivered by helicopter is not safe for people. The application of harmful chemicals that adversely impacts the environment directly influences our human condition, and a violation of the environment is a violation of our human rights."

The Department of Agriculture will hold a public information meeting at 7 pm Thursday, Feb. 19, at Calvary Fellowship Church, 4060 West Amazon Drive.

LOOKING AT ROAD AHEAD FOR OBAMA

Obama might be a symbol of change for our country, but how can we seize the moment to create real and lasting change? That's one of the questions underlying the "Mobilizing New Constituencies: The 2008 Election" symposium, which will take place from 10 am to 5:30 pm Thursday, Feb. 19, at the Wayne Morse Center at the UO.

The program examines what strategies

worked during the 2008 election for organizing new groups of voters, particularly young voters and people of color. It will also look at how those voters can be persuaded to continue their civic engagement.

The symposium features three keynote sessions and two panel discussions. Speakers include two Obama campaign strategists, members of community-based organizations, and experts on race and politics from the University of Washington and the UO. Mayor Kitty Piercy will also speak.

EW spoke with panelist Daniel HoSang, assistant professor of political science and ethnic studies at the UO and a 2008-2009 Wayne Morse Center Resident Scholar.

HoSang has studied institutionalized racism and will be offering his perspectives on the real challenges to achieving racial equality.

In his award-winning dissertation at the University of Southern California, HoSang examined how civil rights opponents have used California's "direct democracy" ballot measure system to get initiatives passed that have resulted in greater segregation in housing and public schooling, and ultimately in lower minority enrollment at state universities. HoSang refers to this process as "gentle apartheid."

California's anti-civil-rights ballot initiatives, HoSang argues, are framed from a perspective of constitutional rights (such as property rights) and use a language of tolerance and inclusion. They have allowed voters to identify as liberal while still supporting policies that promote racial inequality.

HoSang says racism does in fact still exist in our country, and he warns against letting Obama's presidency stand in for a final solution. The real path, he says, is political work that addresses long-standing issues. — *Jessica Hirst*

A Q&A with Daniel HoSang can found as a news story at www.eugeneweekly.com

MEMORIAL SHOW BENEFITS SPONSORS

When local theater aficionada Barbara Nicholls died in early February, she left behind a life of inspiration and service. This week, one local theater company honors her memory with a benefit performance.

Nicholls knew a lot about theater, says Lord Leebrick Theatre Artistic Director Craig Willis. "We had a pretty constant back and forth of opinions and thoughts," he says, looking over the years of emails between the two of them. "She wasn't just interested in local theater; she has children