



REMODEL DESIGN BY KATE LAUE

RIP OUT

Will the city tear down City Hall and leave a pit?

BY ALAN PITTMAN

Say you own a house that's 50 years old and completely paid off but needs a new heater, windows and paint and could possibly fall down in a rare huge earthquake.

Do you tear it down during a deep recession and then pay to rent somewhere else for years while you wait and see if you can ever afford to rebuild something in the pit?

That, critics say, is in effect what the city of Eugene apparently wants to do with City Hall.

"We're asking you today to give direction to move forward on emptying out City Hall, and to begin to tear it down," Eugene facilities manager Mike Penwell told the City Council before they voted 6-1 on the staff suggested motion last month.

Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz, who sat next to Penwell at the March 16 meeting, called the vote a major policy choice and didn't object to Penwell's "tear it down" description of the council action. But afterwards, Ruiz emailed the council to "clarify" that the council didn't actually vote to tear City Hall down.

"This morning's *Register-Guard* reported that you made a decision to demolish the existing City Hall in preparation for phasing the construction of a new City Hall," Ruiz wrote. "To clarify, the motion you passed was to develop and implement a transition plan for moving all remaining city services out of City Hall and develop a phased approach to building a new City Hall at the current site. Although the council has discussed and commented on the pros and cons of full or partial demolition or renovation of the existing City Hall, a decision has not been made. That decision will be made in the next many months."

The official resolution text that the council passed didn't mention tearing down City Hall, and Ruiz had sent an email to the council earlier describing the next day's meeting as including "renovation or replacement of City Hall."

Opaque government aside, Eugene City Councilor Betty Taylor, who missed the vote because she was at a National League of Cities meeting, said city staff decided years ago to tear down the building. Taylor said a city manager told her 15 years ago that managers had already decided to move out and demolish. "There's been this determination, this fixed goal of tearing it down."

Local architect Otto Poticha said he tried and failed to get the city staff to fully present options to the council for renovating City Hall. But he said he was "blown off" when trying to present student work (see images) from a UO architecture class he taught. "I was furious."

Poticha and other critics argue that an extensive remodel and addition to City Hall could be far cheaper, greener, functional, safer and more attractive than tearing the seat of government down and replacing it with an ugly pit.

Taylor agrees. "We should remodel," she said.

So does local architect Jerry Diethelm. "There's certainly a lot of value there," Diethelm said of remodeling the 1964 City Hall building. "It's more affordable and buildable in phases in a way that will be an asset for the community."

Kevin Matthews, editor of *ArchitectureWeek* and Friends of Eugene president, also opposes tearing down City Hall. "Throwing away a functional building shell is pure waste," he wrote in an email to the council.

CHEAPER

"Fully renovating this building is a thirty to fifty-million dollar proposition," Penwell told the city council, explaining the building needs a new envelope and half-million dollars for a new heating system. "Once you start you really have to go pretty far down that path to keep this building moving forward."

But Poticha estimates that a remodel plus added floors would cost about \$30 million, or only \$20 million with grant funding.

Matthews said the city could take advantage of grants available for remodeling and improving the energy efficiency of old buildings.

Poticha estimates that not throwing away the frame of

the building in a remodel would save about \$10 million compared to building a new building of the same size.

"It can't help but be cheaper," Taylor said. "I don't believe it's cheaper to build a whole new building than to remodel."

The city has already wasted \$3 million on designing a \$188 million new City Hall building. The city backed down from the project after surveys showed the pricey design inspired only 40 percent voter support.

To avoid a vote, the city did move to spend \$16 million in reserves on moving the police out of the struggling downtown to a building across from the Eugene Country Club golf course in north Eugene. A new police station bond had already failed three times at the polls. The city reserves, about \$10 million of which are left, were created by reducing services to citizens.

SEISMIC

City officials have long argued that City Hall needs to be replaced because it could fall down in a rare huge earthquake.

"I have an extra sensitivity to that given what we've seen happen," said Mayor Kitty Piercy, referring to the recent Japan earthquake.

But Poticha said, "The whole business about this building is going to come down around their knees is not actually accurate." Poticha said he reviewed the city's 2009 seismic analysis and talked to the consultant. "It (City Hall) is probably as safe if not safer than many of the buildings in the community built within the past ten or fifteen years," he said.

Although city officials have shown great concern about the seismic risk to their office building, they have shown little visible concern about schools and other structures at greater risk. In China, government officials in sturdy buildings are now facing strong criticism for not providing safe buildings to schoolchildren who died in an earthquake.

Poticha says the city estimated that a seismic retrofit of City Hall could cost about \$6 million. He estimates that retrofitting the building as part of a remodel that added offices to a first floor where the city has a parking garage could reduce the cost to about \$2.8 to \$3.5 million.

The city has a surplus of thousands of parking spaces in nearby garages and surface lots downtown.

Poticha says if the city wanted more parking, it could partner with the county and state to add floors to the subsurface county garage a block away.

Poticha said with the police moving out anyway, phasing of the remodel could be done in the empty half of the building with minimal disruption, saving millions in office rental and moving costs. The north side of the building was designed to accommodate additional floors and the parking level is at ground level on the north side and could include daylight offices, according to Poticha.

GREENER

"I can't believe it's not better to recycle and reuse than to destroy and rebuild," said Taylor of calls to tear down the old City Hall and build a new one. She called discarding the building part of the mentality of a "throw-away society."

The city has a policy calling for green building and many officials and citizens have called for an energy efficient new City Hall. But Matthews wrote, "One simply cannot start a seriously green building project with a gratuitous teardown." He said, "it is absolutely true, in many ways, that reuse is the best and overwhelmingly green option."