

IF VOTERS SAY NO, WILL SERVICES GO?

Eugene voters have been told critical services are on the chopping block if Eugene's proposed city services fee fails the May 21 ballot, including some of Eugene's most popular: one of two CAHOOTS vans, funding for the Buckley House sobering station, funding for library services and the Sheldon Pool, a fire crew in the Whiteaker neighborhood and the Looking Glass Station 7. But is it true? Fee supporters and opponents disagree on whether the services will be cut if the fee is voted down.

"It's not like the sequester at the federal level," in which funding went away automatically and across the board, and fee supporter and City Councilor Claire Syrett

says, "The fact is that if we don't find new revenue, we will have to make cuts."

If the fee fails, City Manager Jon Ruiz will present the city's Budget Committee with a budget that does not include funding for the services listed in the City Council resolution that put the fee on the ballot. The Budget Committee, which is made of eight city councilors and eight citizens, will deliberate and make changes to the proposed budget. Ruiz estimates that general fund revenue will fall short by about \$5.9 million in the next fiscal year. Councilors Chris Pryor and Alan Zelenka have stated that to keep their word, they'll vote against funding the services if the fee fails.

Syrett says she hasn't made the same commitment; she says she might try to ease the burden on lost human services while still standing with Zelenka and Pryor. "I don't see how we would patch the gap," she says, and even if the committee didn't cut the particular services listed for fiscal year 2014, it would be other services that would be cut.

Bonny Bettman McCornack, campaign manager for fee opposition group CiTJAW (Citizens for Truth, Justice and the American Way) and a former city councilor, says that her group unequivocally supports the services slated for cuts, and there's money in the city's budget to preserve them. One problem with the city's budget, she says, is that it's using general fund revenue for one-time capital improvement projects like saving for a new City Hall — instead of asking citizens to approve a bond scaled down from the \$188 million proposal that polled poorly in 2007.

Using General Fund revenue meant for public services on a big capital improvement project is a bad public precedent, Bettman McCornack says, and right now there's about \$11 million in funds for City Hall. "That \$11 million came from the general fund, \$1.5 million as recently as December 2012, while they were planning the new tax, and the council can put it right back to fund the threatened services," she says.

Bettman McCornack says that it's logical to connect funding for a new City Hall and the General Fund. "They will either use the new fee revenue to pay for it or they will use the new fee revenue to pay for current General Fund services and then use the revenue freed up in the General Fund to pay for the new building. It is a very poor precedent to pay for large capital projects with general fund revenue meant to provide essential public services.

Councilor Mike Clark wants to sell the Laurelwood Golf Course and has suggested other sources of revenue. In an *EW* viewpoint, Councilor George Brown suggested looking at end-of-year balances, funding for the Riverfront Urban Renewal District, money spent on visioning and economic development and the Reserve for Revenue Shortfall fund balance.

Syrett says she supports an intensive look at the city's budget, but she doesn't think the long process can be completed by June, in time to save the services. — Shannon Finnell

'The fact is that if we don't find new revenue, we will have to make cuts.'

- CITY COUNCILOR CLAIRE SYRETT

MUPTE TAX BREAKS FACE RESTRICTIONS

Eugene's Multiple-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPTE) has stirred up a lot of controversy for awarding tax breaks to downtown developers. Critics say the current ordinance and process don't adequately ensure that the projects the 10-year tax exemptions incentivize are what the public needs. Now MUPTE could undergo a complete overhaul, if an April 22 City Council work session is any indication. Councilors discussed how they might change the city's exemption program, including reworking its minimum requirements, making a new scoring rubric, creating some sort of limit to the total amount of exempted revenue and changing the zone of eligibility from downtown to areas with a greater need for development.

For an application to be eligible for Eugene's MUPTE, it must score 100 points on the program's scale. The total number of points awarded to an application just for being downtown, the only area eligible for MUPTE tax breaks right now? 100. Being in the eligible zone earns all the points necessary. "That's kooky," downtown City Councilor George Brown said at the work session.

Brown tells *EW* that Eugene's program has neither a sensible minimum threshold of requirements nor a clear and specific way of assessing community benefits, but Portland's tax exemption program is better because it creates clear minimum requirements around the principles of affordable housing and community benefits. "Those are their priorities," Brown says. "Ours are looser and need to be tightened up and brought into alignment with those two principles."

Brown says he would like to see a minimum threshold that included a requirement that 20 percent of the new units be affordable for people making 60 percent of the area's median income, some sort of green building standard and making the program competitive by requiring applications to be deliberated in a single time period. "You don't want to make it so restrictive that no developer will touch it," he cautions. "You want the development to occur."

Councilor Alan Zelenka said that he'd like to have a better process for proving that a project needs a MUPTE to be built, which is required under the current ordinance. All



HAPPENING PEOPLE

BY PAUL NEEVEL

MARK ROBERTS

A descendent of Oregon pioneers who built the first wagon road to Triangle Lake in Lane County, Mark Roberts grew up in San Francisco suburbs. His older brother Ed got polio at 13 and afterwards relied on an iron lung, yet became a pioneering advocate for disability rights, a professor and director of the state's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. "Mom insisted he go to high school in person," Roberts says. "I paid for college at Berkeley as an attendant to disabled students, including my brother." After graduation in 1975, he found a vocation building hardwood floors and an avocation making wines. "I had a wine co-op," he says. He got married, had two sons and moved to Eugene in 1991. "Ben was 11 and Gavin was 9," he says. "We were looking for a good Waldorf school." He restarted his flooring business, got divorced in 1995, then decided to stop working in 2003. "I didn't want to pay taxes for war," he says. "I did counter-military recruiting with CALC." In 2005, he started a study group on nonviolent communication, still ongoing, and a volunteer career in mediation. "I go to small claims court on Monday," he says. "We go to a small room and see if we can work it out." Roberts performs on ukulele with the Radar Angels at the Jell-O Art Show and the Oregon Country Fair. He reads stories to pre-school-age kids at 11 am Tuesdays at The Dancing Weasel Toy Store, 30 E. 17th Ave. in Eugene.