

- **350 Eugene** is having a New Year's gathering from 7 to 9 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at the First United Methodist Church, 1367 Olive Street. The agenda includes an expert panel on Oregon's Healthy Climate Bill and updates on climate campaigns.

- A **rally for raising the minimum wage** to \$15 will be at 3:45 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, the Oregon State Capitol. A joint committee public hearing will be at 6 pm that day (not 4 pm as earlier announced) with opportunities to sign up to testify. Carpooling is planned from Eugene and elsewhere in Oregon. See 15noworegon.org to get on the mailing list.

- The NAACP of Lane County is presenting "**Community Conversations: Building Unity in our Community**," a series of five public meetings on race, privilege and equity. The first is from 5:30 to 8 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at the EWEB Community Room, North Building, 500 E. 4th Ave. Additional meetings will be at the same time and place on the second Thursday of each month through May. Reservations requested through naacplanecounty.org or the Facebook page.

- **Eugene PeaceWorks'** general weekly meetings regarding KEPW Homegrown Community Radio have changed back to 6 pm Thursdays (task force meetings are at 5 pm) at Growers Market upstairs at 454 Willamette Street. Find KEPW on Facebook.

- The Eugene Sustainability Commission **Climate Change Committee** meets at 2 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at the Atrium Room 250, 99 W. 10th Ave.

- The Eugene **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee** meets at 5:30 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at the Atrium Sloat Room, 99 W. 10th Ave. The Railroad Quiet Zone is on the agenda.

- The Eugene **Police Commission** meets at 5:30 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at EPD Headquarters Kilcullen Room, 300 Country Club Road. Time is allowed for public comments.

- Artists and writers for Bernie Sanders will hold a "**Bernie Readout and Exhibit**" from 6:30 to 9:30 pm Thursday, Jan. 14, at Tsunami Books, 2585 Willamette Street. Email pittore44@yahoo.com to participate.

- A public forum on the **TransPacific Partnership** will be at 1 pm Saturday, Jan. 16, at the UA Local 290 Plumbers and Steamfitters union training center at 2861 Pierce Parkway in Springfield.

- A celebration of life for longtime activist **Peg Morton** will be from 2 to 4 pm Saturday, Jan. 16, at First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive Street. Morton died Dec. 19 at the age of 85 (see cover story last week). Music at the celebration will include the Raging Grannies and the Eugene Peace Choir. Morton's autobiography will be for sale at the event. Call Community Alliance for Lane County at 485-1755 or email calcepeace@efn.org.

- A volunteer training for the annual **Homeless Point in Time Count** will be from 3 to 5 pm Tuesday, Jan. 19, at 151 W. 7th Ave. RSVP to calcepeace@efn.org. The survey, done in collaboration with Lane County Human Services Division, will be conducted Wednesday, Jan. 27, and will include people sleeping on the streets, in cars, parks, shelters and other places not meant for human habitation. Information gathered will be used in multiple efforts to end homelessness in the county.

LANE COUNTY AREA SPRAY SCHEDULE

Giustina Land and Timber Company, 345-2301, plans to hire Western Helicopter, 503-538-9469, to aerially spread urea fertilizer pellets on 3 units totaling 454.6 acres near Jones Creek and Hall Road and near Goldson Road off of Hwy. 36. See ODF notification 2016-781-00296; call Robin Biesecker at 998-2283 with questions.

Compiled by Jan Wroney and Gary Hale, ForestlandDwellers.org, 342-8332.

CITY HALL COSTS GO UP, TIMELINE LENGTHENS

The projected cost of Eugene's new City Hall has now risen after city councilors requested that city staff look into boosting the new four-story structure's ability to withstand a severe earthquake.

"We asked the city manager to investigate looking into that standard. He said, 'Yeah, but it'll cost more,'" said Councilor Alan Zelenka in an interview with *EW*. The conversation on altering City Hall's structure took place at the last City Council meeting in December, he says.

Zelenka said council members want to upgrade the building's seismic resistance from the "life safety" standard to the "essential facility" standard, because of the recently well-publicized threat of a major West Coast earthquake in a *New Yorker* article.

The "life safety" standard, set by the Oregon Structural Specialty Code, allows people to get out safely in the event of a major earthquake. The "essential facility" standard allows people to get out safely and keeps the building functioning after the quake.

"It's designed to not only allow people to safely get out of the building, but it would still be functioning after a seismic event of some scale," says city spokesperson Jan Bohman of the new standard. She later added that the city doesn't yet know how much the new upgrade will add to the existing \$15 million construction cost of the site. The city will select the winning bid for the construction this spring.

"I can tell you that when the City Council reviewed the schematic design, and in conversations since, given all the increased knowledge and awareness of potential seismic events here, councilors have indicated an interest in upgrading the seismic standard of the building," Bohman wrote in an email to *EW*.

One of the major criticisms of the old City Hall at East 8th Avenue was its lack of earthquake readiness. The original 50-year-old City Hall building was demolished in early 2015, amid a sustained and heated community protest to keep the structure intact and instead renovate its existing features for what was said to be a lesser price tag — a projected \$12 million.

Additionally, the completion of the new City Hall at East 8th Avenue is now delayed by a year; it was scheduled to be finished by the end of 2016, according to the timeline on the city's website. Bohman now says it will be about two years, the end of 2017, until the doors open on the new building.

The new plans for City Hall still include space for a public plaza (complete with a water fountain) and parking lot on the west side of the block. Lane County's Board of Commissioners floated the idea of building a new county courthouse on the same site as City Hall at a public hearing with the Eugene City Council in June 2014.

There are no approved plans yet to build a new courthouse next to the new City Hall. — *Jeslyn Lemke*

YOU SAY KESEY SQUARE, THEY SAY PARK BLOCKS

Bring up the topic of Kesey Square and the importance of downtown open public space with city of Eugene officials and you can expect the conversation to be steered to the Park Blocks.

Kesey Square has problems, city employees say, including issues of design, the preponderance of "travelers" dominating the space, the simple fact that it's flat and that people just don't want to be there.

The issue of public space downtown became a hot-button issue in October after a group of local developers proposed to the city that they would like to purchase the public parcel of land that is Kesey Square and put up an apartment building in its place with retail.

The group — headed by Rowell Brokaw Architecture (the same firm that City Manager Jon Ruiz appointed to work on

City Hall) and downtown business owner Kaz Oveissi — says it intends to request a Multi-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPTE) and a loan from the city for the project. Oveissi told *EW* in January that, if approved, they were hoping to start construction on Kesey Square this spring in conjunction with another building project across the street.

"What about the Park Blocks?" Councilor Pryor mused during one interview in November. "Those were intended to be public gathering spaces."

It seems, however, that the Park Blocks may be even more problematic than the city's claims about Kesey Square.

Just ask Larry Oswald, owner of Toadstool Cupcakes. Oswald recently closed his two cupcake shops in Eugene, one of which faced the Park Blocks at 868 W. Park Street. He recently relocated the business to Portland.

"It's the worst place downtown to be," Oswald said of the Park Blocks in a Jan. 11 interview. "There's a huge problem in the Park Blocks that is totally being overlooked."

Oswald explained that in the southwest Park Block, the one closest to his store, 30 to 50 people — what the city might call "travelers" — gather daily. He said he saw abuse, drug use and public defecation. The city brought in Porta Potties, which Oswald said attracted more people.

The condition of the Park Blocks, however, is not the only reason Oswald is moving his business.

"One of the main reasons that we did leave is the plans for the four-story building going in the parking lot," Oswald said. "We'll be in a construction zone for over a year," adding "it was going to be horrendous for business."

Oswald is speaking of the new development — 33 E. Broadway — being built this spring across from Kesey Square by the Rowell Brokaw Architecture and Kaz Oveissi group.

As for the Park Blocks, in the three years Toadstool was open, Oswald said he didn't see the city do much to address the problems. "I saw it get worse and worse and worse."

So what is happening with the Park Blocks?

"We haven't been given any directives to go develop a new plan for the Park Blocks right now," Craig Carnagey, the city of Eugene's parks and open space director, told *EW* in December.

The Park Blocks fall under the management of the Parks and Open Space department, but Carnagey said the department cannot re-design the site without a directive from the City Council. Currently, Carnagey said his department is working on a more holistic approach to all city parks and open space.

But Carnagey adds, at least anecdotally, that he does hear safety complaints about the Park Blocks. He said there have been successful programming efforts, but design issues need to be addressed.

Councilor Pryor, even though he said he prioritizes investment in the Park Blocks as public space more than Kesey Square, also noted the Park Blocks need help.

"If you look at the Park Blocks, they're not that great," he said. "Right now, we don't have good public engagement space."

It may seem strange to some that the city is dismissive of Kesey Square, but encouraging of the Park Blocks, which seems to suffer from similar problems, only more intensely.

The Eugene City Council held its first work session and meeting about the Park Blocks and open space downtown Jan. 11; no decisions were made except to gather information. Several councilors noted that the Park Blocks are extremely underutilized and that the surrounding businesses literally have their backs to the square.

For five-plus years, the city has had access to \$500,000 in urban renewal funds for improvement and rehabilitation of the Park Blocks. The Urban Renewal District expires in 2017, after which the \$500,000 will no longer be available.

The city of Eugene is accepting RFEIs for Kesey Square through Jan. 15. In February, the City Council will consider options for Kesey Square.

To read an extended version of this article, visit eugene-weekly.com. — *Alex V. Cipolle*