

# WHY ISN'T THE CITY TALKING ABOUT THE EWEB BUILDING FOR CITY HALL?

**W**ith EWEB talking about selling off its riverfront headquarters and City Hall in flux, many wonder why Eugene City Council continues to steer the conversation away from EWEB.

Things started to go sideways again for the tangled City Hall project this summer when construction bids came in \$10 million higher than expected, sending the city back to the drawing board to determine where best to put its new building and what exactly it should look like. More complications arose as the city tried wangling some portion of the 8th and Oak “butterfly lot” from the county.

In the midst of Eugene’s City Hall troubles, EWEB manager Frank Lawson announced his plan to sell the agency’s 4th Avenue site and shift all EWEB employees to their Roosevelt Operations Center in the Bethel neighborhood over the next couple of years.

Lawson’s push to offload the 100,000-square-foot building has rekindled discussions about the riverfront property as a possible future home for City Hall.

For the publically owned utility, it’s smart business, Lawson says.

In an email to *EW*, Lawson writes: “Given EWEB’s size and profile, having a split operation within the same community is inefficient.”

Lawson is aware EWEB’s 4th Avenue building comes up from time to time when city leaders talk about the future of City Hall, but he says he has “had no discussions with city staff about a potential use of the EWEB Headquarters Building for this purpose.”

“It is my understanding that some discussions did occur several years ago,” Lawson writes.

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## EWEB is ‘over three times the space for half the money of what we’re currently considering.’

— CITY COUNCILOR MIKE CLARK

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And he’s right, but the council dismissed the idea again much more recently than that. In light of further delays and ballooning construction costs, Councilor Mike Clark urged the council in July to reconsider its position on the EWEB building.

“I’m going to apologize in advance to my colleagues for beating a dead horse because I’m quite aware that they’re tired of it,” Clark said.

Clark did not respond to requests for comment before press time, but the Ward 5 Councilor has long argued the merits of moving City Hall to the EWEB site, which he has said is “over three times the space for half the money of what we’re currently considering.”

Clark said EWEB has two appraisals for their building. One values the property at \$12 million, the other at \$14 million.

“I really don’t understand why we’re not considering this seriously,” Clark said.

Mayor Kitty Piercy says the city is not looking into the EWEB option right now.

The council, she says, has rejected Clark’s EWEB idea several times already, adding: “Generally, there was a council commitment to the revitalization of downtown, a desire to use the ideal core location of our city property and no indication that EWEB had any intention of leaving their current location.”

She says also that the other councilors weren’t keen to add costs associated with buying new real estate.

“It has not recently been brought back to council for discussion,” Piercy says, “and Councilor Clark has not put in a work session request to my knowledge.”

Until that happens, staff will be following the last council-given direction, which is to pursue a deal with the county that includes the former City Hall block and the “butterfly lot.”

“We are in the middle of looking at options downtown and my mind remains open to what the process reveals,” the mayor says. “I think cost, location, functionality and timeliness all matter.”

Still, the mayor maintains “it’s better to have City Hall downtown, with easy connection to other government buildings. That makes it easier for the public.” ■

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