

Courthouse Blues

LANE COUNTY ASKS VOTERS IN MAY BALLOT TO PAY FOR A NEW COURTHOUSE

By Henry Houston

Inside a perimeter chain-link fence that surrounds the former location of Eugene's City Hall, a sign proclaims to those driving by on Seventh Avenue: "Making Space for Justice."

The space is there. The county asked the city of Eugene to hold up on building a new City Hall on the lot, which wouldn't have used the space well enough, Lane County Administrator Steve Mokrohisky tells *Eugene Weekly*.

Rather than a new City Hall on that lot, Measure 20-299 seeks voter approval of a \$154-million bond to build a new courthouse. If passed, the county would receive \$94 million from the state and \$4 million in federal funding.

For property owners in Lane County, this means paying an additional 27 cents per \$1,000 assessed value annually.

If the state decides to not pay that money and the bond passes, the county will not spend the money, according to county code.

The current courthouse, located at 125 E. 8th Avenue, doesn't meet the needs of the community, the county says. Its design doesn't offer equitable access to justice-related services.

A new courthouse, supporters say, would not only take advantage of one-time money from the state, but the bond money could be kept local because of Commissioner Joe Berney's advocacy for a community benefits agreement (CBA).

... AND JUSTICE FOR ALL?

What's most telling about the age of the building is a Cold War-era klaxon on the wall, meant to scream out if Soviet missiles were ever launched toward Lane County. Built in 1959, the current courthouse doesn't meet the needs of the residents who access it today, county officials say.

Because the building was built in the late 1950s, its design predates the American Disabilities Act, says Debra Vogt, Lane County Circuit Court's presiding judge.

"It is embarrassing for people," Vogt says.

ADA issues emerge for people who require wheelchairs or walkers. If it's a defendant, that means entering the courthouse through the only entrance — the front — and walking through the courthouse, a sort of reminder to the general public that you're about to face a criminal charge, Vogt says.

The logistics of making the courtroom accessible for those in wheelchairs is troublesome because there are steps to climb to enter the jury box, she adds.

This could impact fair representation when selecting jurors.

"Sometimes, jurors will come into court, and they will say, 'I want to participate. I've always wanted to be a juror, but how can I?'" the judge says of people with physical disabilities. "I want to accommodate them, and often I can't."

Elizabeth Rambo, courthouse administrator, adds that if someone in a wheelchair wants to serve on a jury, it's almost impossible to accommodate him or her. Vogt explains that jury box accommodation means putting the person near the in-custody defendant and the deputy, and "it makes people uncomfortable."

A constitutional rights issue emerges when barriers exist for jury selection.

"Maybe the defendant is in a wheelchair, so we're not going to accommodate jurors in wheelchairs?" Vogt says. "If you don't have full participation of your entire

community in the justice process, then I don't think your constitutional rights can be safeguarded in any way."

THE ECONOMY, STUPID

The Lane County Board of County Commissioners announced the need for a new courthouse during the January 2019 State of the County.

In his address, Commissioner Jay Bozievich proudly said the county looks to the advice of experts. Then he presented a video discussing the problems faced by the current courthouse. The video essentially kicked off the county's campaign for the courthouse bond.

The video cost the county \$4,500, according to documents acquired by *EW*.

However, the ailments addressed in the video don't seem to raise concerns for voters, according to a poll paid for by the county. What has generated interest and support for the bond is the county's pledge to use a community benefits agreement (CBA).

On Feb. 5, county commissioners approved the use of adopting local economic impact goals through a CBA for the courthouse.

According to the order's language, the CBA would promote the use of local businesses, contractors and workers; ensure that jobs with the courthouse project pay a living wage and offer family health-care benefits; prioritize diversity and equity in the workplace; incorporate sustainability in the project's design and construction; and use state or federally approved training and apprenticeship programs.

Berney says a CBA would ensure that the bond money would mostly stay with local workers.

The county recently calculated an economic impact estimate of the courthouse project, should the bond pass.

Building the courthouse could provide an estimated \$53.2 million in wages for more than 1,330 workers and \$9.8 million in wages for vendors and construction material suppliers. It would also inject an additional \$19.3 million into the local economy, according to Devon Ashbridge, the county spokesperson.

The county paid to conduct a poll in November 2018. Participants were asked if they would support a \$164-million bond, which is higher than what the county is asking for in the bond measure.

Forty-seven percent said yes.

After hearing arguments in support of why the county might need a courthouse, 53 percent said yes.

What's resonated locally — aside from the promise made by the state to pitch in \$94 million — is the CBA.

County officials such as Mokrohisky and Rambo have been on a media tour to discuss the courthouse bond. While speaking on a radio show in Cottage Grove, someone called into express support for the CBA, Mokrohisky says.

The CBA seems to make a difference, Berney says. He says the political action committee (PAC) he's active on in support of the courthouse, Equal Justice for All, conducted its own poll. The PAC's poll had a similar result, but the messaging that impacted participants' opinion the most was the CBA.

"The highest, highest, highest message for changing people's minds to a 'yes' on this issue — 67 percent — is that there will be this community benefits agreement," Berney says. "Not only are we creating a justice building, in the process we're building justice in terms of these areas." ■



HAPPENING PEOPLE

BY PAUL NEEVEL

Lindsey Hayward

Born and raised in Colorado Springs, Lindsey Hayward grew up in a house at the top of a hill. She cruised down the hill on her bicycle with her feet off the pedals. "I remember the day, when I was eight years old, that I first rode up the hill to the top of our driveway," she says. "I remember the feeling of freedom and confidence of being on a bike." Hayward rode her bike to class at Creighton University in Omaha and got into long-distance cycling while earning a degree in psychology with a minor in business. She returned to Colorado Springs and worked for three years with Kids on Bikes, a local nonprofit focused on low-income fifth-graders. "They could earn a bike by setting a goal and reaching it," she explains. "Each kid would set goals in academics, character or behavior." In 2010, she moved to Eugene with her then fiancé, now husband, Darrin Hayward. She completed an MBA program in entrepreneurship at the University of Oregon in 2014, and found work with United Way of Lane County, making home visits for early childhood education. In May of 2017 she was hired as operations manager of JUMP Bikes, the company that supplies and maintains the blue bicycles offered for rental by PeaceHealth Rides. "We put bikes out in April 2018," she says. "The morning we launched, I saw a gentleman riding on the bike path at 7 am. I was so excited!" With 300 bikes now available at 39 hubs in Eugene, PeaceHealth Rides will celebrate its first anniversary with a birthday table at the Eugene Marathon on the weekend of April 26-28 and a display of bike-themed art at Kesey Square during the first Friday ArtWalk in May.