

NO EUGENE CITY JAIL

Discuss meaningful changes in the justice system before discussing a municipal jail

The conversation around needing a new municipal jail in Eugene has been gaining traction in local Facebook groups like Lane County Mugshots Uncensored. As the discussion grows, I find myself questioning whether we really need additional jail space when the existing facilities in the area are nowhere near full capacity.

As of mid-January, the Springfield Municipal Jail is holding just 54 inmates, out of a possible 98. Meanwhile, the Lane County Jail currently houses 277 inmates, with a capacity for 507. These figures raise a simple question: Why are we even discussing building a Eugene municipal jail when the county jail we already have is underutilized?

There's more to this issue than just capacity numbers. A significant number more of the empty beds in Lane County Jail could be rented to the Eugene Police Department or used for county inmates, but there has been no taxpayer funding allocated to cover the costs of those beds. If we're not even making use of the available space for county or Eugene municipal inmates, why should we commit to building a municipal facility for Eugene that we can't afford to operate?

It's also important to consider that a Eugene municipal jail would likely only house inmates facing municipal court charges, which, much like the Springfield Jail, excludes felons and those facing serious charges in Lane County Circuit Court. Those individuals would still be sent to the larger Lane County Jail.

So, we're left with the question: What exactly would we be gaining with a Eugene municipal jail? It seems to me that we should be looking more critically at how we approach sentencing guidelines, pre-trial detention policies and how long individuals can be held before trial.

Perhaps it's time to evaluate sentencing guidelines to see if we, as a society, feel convicted individuals should serve longer sentences. If we believe suspects are being arrested only to be quickly released before their trial, maybe it's time to consider stricter pre-trial release laws, particularly for repeat offenders or those who fail to appear in court as required.

We could be making meaningful changes in how the justice system handles these cases, instead of just expanding our jail system.

In my opinion, there is no urgent need for a municipal jail in Eugene, at least not until we can make full use of the beds we already have in the Lane County Jail. Why invest in new infrastructure when we can't even afford to fill the empty beds that are already available?

Until taxpayers are willing to fund the use of the beds that remain unused, and until the county and the city can sit down and figure out a better agreement for the city of Eugene's use of county beds, I don't see why we should prioritize building a Eugene municipal jail space. Instead, let's have a broader conversation about how we approach the justice system and whether changes need to be made to ensure fairness and accountability across the board.

The debate over jail space is far from over online, but at this point, it seems clear to me that our resources would be better spent on reforming how we handle sentencing, pre-trial release and overall criminal justice policy, rather than building a Eugene jail we don't yet need.

Michael Weber, known for his extensive coverage of crime news in Lane County, continues to provide valuable updates to the local community. He runs the largest crime watch group in Lane County, Lane County Mugshots Uncensored, which currently has over 84,500 members. Support for local journalism is essential, and donations can be made via Venmo to @Michael-Weber-379 (last four digits of phone number: 0825).

NEWS

Bricks \$ Mortar BY CHRISTIAN WIHTOL

E-COMMERCE UNKNOWN

Building with the footprint of a 'sortation center' slated for Eugene farmland

A massive e-commerce distribution center is in the works for farmland next to the Eugene Airport. But the identity of the occupant isn't being made public.

The single-story center will total more than 323,000 square feet, according to the building permit application filed late last month. That's the size of two average Costco stores. In other words, big by Eugene standards.

The building will have the footprint of a typical Amazon "sortation center," a regional hub where up to 300 workers use conveyor systems and other machinery to sort packages, and a truck fleet to deliver them.

Seattle-based Amazon did not reply to inquiries from *Eugene Weekly*.

The application doesn't list the planned occupant, but the architect and contractor is Connecticut-based BL Companies, which specializes in building facilities for Amazon.

The site — 85 acres — is on the west side of Highway 99 North, two miles north of the intersection of Hwy 99 and Randy Pape Beltline. It is immediately east of the airport.

But city officials have known for months that a major development is likely on the spot. Last summer, the owners of the land alerted the city that their goal was to create "an industrial center, consisting of a warehouse, distribution facilities, delivery vehicle storage and associated parking."

Greg Evans, the Eugene city councilor for that ward, did not return emails and phone messages from *EW*. The city's communications staff was unable to say if the city knows the identity of the occupant.

Farmland no longer protected

The site is farmland — usually sacrosanct in Oregon. Until 2017, the parcel was protected from development. But that year, in updating its 20-year

growth plans, Eugene expanded its urban growth boundary to include the site, and tabbed it for industrial use.

Last summer, the City Council approved the owners' request to bring the property into the city limits, a formality allowing development.

The parcel is owned by a group headed by Lydia Lane Kulus of Sisters, Oregon, another Sisters resident, a Eugene resident and a Texas resident, land and planning records show. They appear to have owned the land for a number of years. The *Weekly* was unable to reach them.

The building permit application says the complex will cost \$24 million and be an "ecommerce facility with parking, fleet storage and stormwater treatment facilities." The land owners tout the proximity to the airport and Hwy 99.

Could it be Amazon?

The complex might be for Amazon — but who knows? The e-commerce behemoth has built distribution facilities in Oregon at a brisk clip. All the big ones are in the Portland and Salem areas.

Amazon's biggest facilities, up to 1 million square feet or more, are "fulfillment and distribution centers," where items from manufacturers are stored and sorted for shipping to sortation centers.

Amazon's biggest site in Oregon is its soon-to-open fulfillment center in Woodburn next to Interstate-5, north of Salem. It sports 3.8 million square feet of space spread across five stories, according to published reports.

Amazon's other Oregon fulfillment centers are in Multnomah and Marion counties. Amazon has sortation centers in Washington and Multnomah counties.

Some businesses other than Amazon are building super-sized distribution centers around the country — but typically not in Oregon, and not at 300,000-plus square feet.

Bricks \$ Mortar is a column anchored by Christian Wihtol, who worked as an editor and writer at The Register-Guard in Eugene 1990-2018, much of the time focused on real estate, economic development and business. Reach him at Christian@EugeneWeekly.com.

slant *Screwed?*

BY EW STAFF

>> An indoor games issue

inauguration week? Well, kids, sometimes folks need a distraction. Enjoy the *Weekly's* foray into Dungeons & Dragons. Not everyone has the chance to be distracted — especially not those most affected by Donald J. Trump's policies. *Eugene Weekly* is planning a know-your-rights and survival guide issue in the near future. Are you a lawyer, activist or advocate with advice to give? Let us know, Editor@EugeneWeekly.com.

>> The events of the 2025 presidential inauguration have been tumultuous.

Now-former President Joe Biden commuted the sentence of Native American activist

Leonard Peltier, who will be spending the rest of his life in home confinement. Peltier, 80, who is Turtle Mountain Chippewa and was a member of Indigenous rights group the American Indian Movement, was part of a group of Native American men who traded gunfire with and killed two FBI special agents at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in June 1975. Peltier has maintained he did not shoot them, and two other men were found not guilty on self-defense grounds. Supporters greeted the news as a step toward reconciliation for Native communities.

Meanwhile, Trump granted clemency

to the nearly 1,600 people charged in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, including those who assaulted police officers and committed seditious conspiracy. Right-wing extremists and white supremacists were thrilled.

He also signed an executive order declaring the U.S. would recognize only two sexes: male and female. Not that he'd care, but that's not even scientifically correct, let alone morally.

We're not even going to get into the TikTok thing.

>> Whoops! In last week's issue a stray paragraph from the Palestine viewpoint snuck into the viewpoint on the Mims Houses. We apologize, and the online version was correct! But as long as we are talking about the Mimses, we had a caller who let us know she feels that **Annie Mims doesn't get enough credit**

when it comes to the tremendous legacy that C.B. and Annie Mims left in Eugene and to the Black community. She also expressed a desire that the Gordon Hotel's C.B. Mims Sanctuary Room also recognizes Annie Mims' work.

>> **"Homelessness, taxes, transportation, health care and environmental protections" are a few of the things the Oregon Legislature will address** in the 2025 session that kicked off Jan. 21. The state Legislature is dominated by Democrats, but sparks fly no matter what party has a majority. City Club of Eugene brings together Rep. Julie Fahey, the Democratic speaker of the House, and Rep. Lucetta Elmer, deputy leader of the Republican Caucus, to discuss their goals and priorities for the session ahead noon Friday, Jan. 24, at WOW Hall, 291 West 8th Avenue.