

Oregon City Police Building and Bond Measure

The City of Oregon City is placing a bond measure on the September 2017 ballot for the construction of a new Police and Court facility at the site of the former Mt. Pleasant School. Here are some FAQ's about the measure.

1. Why do we need to build a new Police and Court Facility?

The City building, which houses the Police Department and Municipal Court is unsafe, inadequately sized, and does not meet seismic standards required by law. The current building was once the state welfare office; it was never designed to be a police facility. As threats to police have become more common, the need for staff and community members to be safe is a priority. Police employees need work spaces that are hardened in ways that keep them safe, while remaining welcoming and accessible to the public.

The lobby in the current facility is confusing for the public and there are no spaces for interviews. Victims need to be able to talk with officers in privacy; currently they are interviewed in the lobby. Because of the building size, the Police Department additionally uses three double-wide trailers which are parked on site.

Finally, the current building does not meet seismic standards set forth by the State of Oregon for essential needs facilities. These standards are to be met by 2022 (ORS 455.400). In the event of an earthquake or seismic event it is vitally important that the Police Department is able to continue operation and serve the community. The new facility would include a modern Emergency Operations Center.

2. If the bond is approved in September, will the City be allowed to raise my taxes?

No. Voting 'Yes' allows the City of Oregon City to issue revenue bonds to move forward with the construction project and to pay for the bond with the funds already being collected through the utility fee. Approval of the bond would not authorize the City to raise taxes.

3. How is the City going to pay back the bonds?

In 2015, the City Commission approved a utility fee in order to put money aside for the eventual construction of a new police and court facility. The bonds will be repaid from those funds. The fee will continue to be collected until the bonds are repaid. At that time, the utility fee will no longer be collected.

4. Why didn't the City go out for a conventional bond instead of charging a fee?

In January, 2014, the Police Chief was given direction by the City Commission to seek public input regarding a utility fee or a conventional bond as a means of paying for a new building. A utility fee is charged to all households and businesses using utilities while a conventional bond is paid for by property owners only. Through neighborhood association meetings, community group meetings, and an open house, the community expressed more interest in a utility fee because the fairness of the utility fee and the fact that everybody paid a little, versus property owners paying for everything. The fee is \$6.50 per month, whereas the average homeowner would have to pay \$10 per month for a conventional property tax bond. People also liked that the fee would end once the project was completed. The Chief reported this preference to the Commission in May of 2015, at which time it was decided to move forward with the utility fee. The fee was

implemented in January of 2016 and the funds have been going into a restricted reserve for the future project.

5. If the bond does not pass, will the fee go away?

No. If the bond approval does not pass, the fee will continue to be collected and funds will be saved until the City can pay for the project entirely out of the reserves.

6. Why is the City putting this back on the ballot? Didn't it get voted down in November of 2016?

Yes. The 2016 ballot measure would have allowed the City to purchase general obligation bonds to fund the building. Though general obligation bonds would have allowed the City to increase property taxes, the City had no intention of raising property taxes to fund the building and instead intended to rely on existing revenue sources. While the City tried to convey this, staff received a lot of feedback that the ballot language in 2016 was confusing. In fact, staff were repeatedly told from citizens that had they understood their taxes would not have increased, they would have voted yes. Therefore, the City is putting this back on the ballot, but as a revenue bond instead of a general obligation bond. This ensures that the City will NOT be allowed to raise property taxes to repay the bonds.

7. Where will the new police and court facility be constructed?

The City has purchased the former Mt. Pleasant School site from the school district for the new location of the Police Department and Municipal Court. Once the construction project is complete, the current site of the Police Department on Warner Milne will be sold with the proceeds going to offset the cost of construction.