

## Mayor's Corner

### 11-01-2021

On June 23, 2020, as a City Councilor, I wrote: *Carlton really does need a new city hall...but now is a bad time to think about committing millions of dollars (well...there's never a really good time for that!) ... **At some point we are going to have to bite the bullet, so to all of you: keep in mind and think about what you envision for such a structure...and where?***

At the time I wrote that, I was one of two councilors adamantly resisting moving forward on a new city hall – because I believed repairing the current building might still be an option. At that time we had never seen all of the repair estimates or been given complete information about the current building's condition; plus with the Covid shutdown, we had no idea what our economy be like in the next year or so...whether or not we'd even be able to finance such a building.

A year later the financial picture looks much more solid and we have more information about the condition of the current building as well as more clarity on ways to pay for it; and at a special session of the council, the majority agreed that continuing the current “patch and scratch” maintenance approach to the existing buildings is not just “penny-wise and pound-foolish,” it's bordering on negligence and endangering the safety of our citizens and our staff, as well as exposing the city to some potentially expensive legal actions that we would not win.

The time to bite the bullet has come. Not everyone in town is going to jump on the idea of a new building – I get that. I'm not what you'd call ecstatic about it either. But the dangers and costs of not doing anything far outweigh the benefits of sucking it up and getting it done.

The first question of course is: How much is this going to cost? Frankly, that's one of the unknowns at this point because NO DECISIONS have been made regarding what the building will look like, what it will be made of, how large it will be or how it will be financed ... in short, up to now it's nothing more than a conversation and we're exploring all options for both the building and financing – excluding any kind of bond measure (that was one of the reasons for the survey the city still has running & if you've not filled one out, I encourage you to do so. The responses are giving an interesting perspective on what folks in town would like to see in a building that reflects our city and will be around for a few generations.) <https://www.ci.carlton.or.us/citycouncil/webform/city-information-delivery-survey>

But since we've up to now, not fully described to you what exactly the problems are with the current city hall building, I made a list – of both the issues and the estimated repair costs. The estimates all came from outside contractors, businesses, and our city engineer, all specifically licensed to work on government buildings. They were all provided in the last 12 months.

What you need to keep in mind is that these are estimates only & in most cases they came with a warning that once repairs are started, just as in home repairs, there may be more issues and more costs once the work begins. The other thing to remember is that there are special construction and installation requirements for government buildings that residential buildings don't have to comply with – so building costs are higher.

The following list of repairs is not comprehensive, nor is it final. Some of these would need to be done repeatedly, until one day the city lost a lawsuit and was required to not only pay out the lawsuit, but also to build that new city hall at even more cost than if we do it now.

Keep in mind these are VERY conservative/bare bones estimates, nor do they include any liability payouts the city may incur due to accidents/injuries or other legal issues that can be attributed to inadequate facilities.

**City Hall:** Roof: leaking/failing; needs full repair/replacement Cost est: **\$50,000**

**Police Building:** Roof: leaking/failing: est: **\$23,000** (this is after the city spent approx. \$60,000 just three years ago to refurbish & repair the building for police use & after all of that there's been a bucket in the middle of the floor since last spring to catch water from a new leak.

Both estimates are best case scenarios. There are multiple layers of roofing material and the need to coordinate HVAC installation with roof replacement. Given the ages of both buildings there's every reason to suspect now-outlawed building materials were used, requiring removal and remediation which could easily double those estimates.

**City Hall:** HVAC: Failing; repair or replacement needed ASAP: est: **\$150,000**

Repair on these systems will require work in attic which will reveal any issues with roofing.

Failing circulation systems in both buildings create air quality issues, such as bacteria and mold buildup creating what is known as a "toxic building." As buildings age, lawsuits arising out of health claims of mold infestation and 'Sick Building Syndrome' have become common. Its presence has shuttered schools, closed hospital wings, and driven employers to find alternate work sites.

**AV equipment:** est: **\$12,000**

The CMU building material severely interferes with broadcast signals, creating problematic broadcasting of any meeting held inside the building. State law now requires state governments & agencies to make public meetings available via internet.

**Parking lot:** Cost estimate: **\$200,000**

Sub-structure is failing. Lot will need to be excavated to the ground, with new packing/substrate installed before any paving repair can be accomplished.

**City Hall/Accessibility/ADA accommodation:** Cost estimate: **\$175,000** (Curbing, stairs/ramps/entries only)  
Accessibility is not adequate. All of the curbing and entries need to be replaced with ADA approved structure.

There have been approximately 12 instances of someone falling and significantly hurting themselves on the current curbing/sidewalks. We've been lucky not all of them put in an injury claim, although they could have. We've had around 6 claims with damage awards ranging between \$40,000 - \$60,000 each (approximately \$300,000 in payouts.) & you all know how insurance works – the more they pay in such injury claims, the more the city (meaning you and me) pays in increased insurance rates.

**City Hall & Police building: ADA part 2:** Building interior: Due to size and existing construction materials, the buildings cannot be retro-fitted to ADA compliance. There is no space in either building to add wider halls, door entries, ADA restrooms or to install amenities for hearing or vision impaired visitors or staff. The fines and lawsuits for failure to address these issues could easily cost as much as a new building.

**Emergencies City Hall & Police:** Single backup generator for City and Police: **\$200,000 minimum**

Currently neither building has emergency power backup so no ability to function in any emergency events similar to last spring's ice storm. City staff had no choice but to close the building & attempt to work from home. The city was not able to perform our primary mission: to provide services and support to our citizens.

Without emergency power backup there is no ability to assist residents in need of shelter or communication. (During the ice storm officers took their equipment to their own homes for recharging.) We cannot provide assistance for anything as basic as charging cell phones, or providing a warming shelter; there is no way to secure confidential business, legal or private citizen information the city is required to keep secure and confidential, so even if heating or cooling was available unlimited public access can't be allowed in the building which means no warming or cooling shelter.

Neither the School or Fire Station are equipped to provide community support or shelter in such an emergency.

### **Seismic event**

The current City Hall and Police buildings were built with cinder block – hollow blocks that were never stabilized or reinforced. In the event of an earthquake – no matter how mild – the likelihood of the buildings' failure is very high. If the buildings are occupied at the time of such an event, the chances of occupants being injured are equally high, and in addition to the emotional distress of our citizens being injured, the city will be dealing with liability claims for any injuries to staff or visitors.

An additional, practical, consideration is that if the event is a long-term weather event the lack of power and adequate insulation in the building could cause frozen pipes or overheated equipment that would have to be replaced or repaired at significant cost. Last year, our city experienced the ice storm and a few months later the heat-dome gave us several days of 116-degree temperatures. Both events caused power outages at city hall, leaving no way to assist citizens.

**Other safety issues:** The current police building has no facilities where officers can decontaminate should they be exposed to any toxic substances or bodily fluids – from a suspect transmitting a possibly contagious disease, to a toxic waste spillage. Currently they have to go home to shower or clean up, thereby exposing their families to those dangers.

Aside from the fact that this is another potential for the city to face legal action if any of those family members become ill, it's just not right to ask our police to deal with such situations and not be willing to provide them with basic safety equipment.

### **City Hall: Space for public activities:**

City hall contains only one meeting room, the Council Chambers which means we have limited space, especially in this time of heightened need for more public space, for citizens who want to observe or participate in their city government. The Council room is used throughout the week for other city business. It is not available to the general public for either daytime or after hours activities.

Regularly scheduled events:

Municipal court is held once a month on a Wednesday in city council chambers, from 4:15 until it is finished.

Council meetings

Planning Commission meetings

Tourism Committee meetings

Staff meeting

Consultations/presentations from city contractors

Currently in the city hall offices there is no more space. Even bringing in temporary help requires setting the temp worker up in the conference room which is always needed for other meetings and conferences.

### **Growth**

With the current and future population growth scheduled for our city, we're looking, in the next two years at many new residents. Portland State's population forecast projects a population of 2,699 for 2030 and for 2035 it is 2,890.

**Food for thought:** The new JR Meadows 1 subdivision contains 38 single-family homes, plus a 10-unit apartment building. If you figure on average each house contains 3 people (2 adults/1 child), that's 114 new residents (not even counting the apartments) – already a quarter of the PSU estimated 10-year increase. And construction on JR Meadows 2 is well underway, along with, now a third subdivision on the horizon. I don't think we're going to have to wait until 2030 to hit that population mark.

All of these folks are going to need existing city services or require others we don't currently provide. With increased demand, we are looking at increased staff in a building that barely accommodates our current needs.

### **A good example of this is Code Enforcement.**

Up until a year ago, this wasn't a front-tier issue, but it has this year risen to the top of the list. Code complaints have significantly increased in the last year and citizens have expressed a wish for the city to actively begin initiating code enforcement actions. To do this a single, full-time code enforcement officer will be needed – an individual who patrols the city watching for violations, actively notifies and follows up on the notifications. In order to have such a person on staff not only do we need to find the money to pay them, we also need to find them an office space, and right now there is none.

We can do our best to keep our city small and our government costs down, but despite our best efforts to control growth our city IS going to grow, adding more citizens who will need an increasing variety of services. Our current building that was built to serve slightly more than 1,000 citizens is now limping along serving twice that number, with no indications that the growth is going to ease up any time soon.

Our city was founded by people who looked ahead and as well as they were able, planned ahead for inevitable growth. We've all benefited from their foresight, and the time has come for us to now follow their good example. Our current city officials and staff are working hard to ensure that any new building will be adequate for many years to come, that it will blend in with the existing downtown architecture, and that it will not cost any more than necessary; we'll live every day with the decision we make – we're being as careful as we can to get it right!