

Big changes are shaping up that could turn a faltering City Hall process into a real win for the downtown. Perhaps it will yet turn out to be a good thing that the old City Hall was torn down prematurely before there was a solid master plan for the city's block or a true and reliable estimate for what a City Hall replacement was going to cost.

When something jarring and game-changing interrupts a design project, the most productive and professional response is, well, "it's a new program!" Abraham Lincoln had famously advised, "**As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.**" And that's where we find ourselves with our City Hall project. Two large elephants have entered into the project space.

**The first of course is cost.** As everyone now knows, the bids for the proposed building came in too high. Spending \$28,000,000 or \$600 per square foot on a modest 30,000 square foot headquarters office building has become obviously far too much for too little. An attempt to whittle back the price still remains a possibility, but reducing costs through value engineering often only results in the stripping away of too many of the pleasurable surface qualities of a project that touch on one's everyday experience. So, appropriately: time out.

**The second was the unexpectedly large size of building needed for the new county courthouse.** It had been loosely hoped that the eastern half of the block would eventually become the site of a new Lane County Courthouse, but the shelf life of this master plan expired when the county began their serious courthouse program planning. It turned out that they would need the whole city block for their new consolidated courthouse, and the idea of a courthouse building wrapping around a City Hall sitting on the SW corner was a non-starter for all but the conceptually frozen.

The City Hall strategy had been to link the initial building to a future Phase II office building behind it. Phase II was to afford the eventual reconsolidation of city services when their downtown leases expired, although any serious acknowledgement of the timing, cost and financing of a Phase II building had been carefully avoided. The numbers just got too large sounding if one admitted that the real cost of a new City Hall was Phase I plus Phase II, and that the building of a Phase I headquarters meant a commitment to a costly Phase II office building down the road. A larger courthouse eliminated any possibility of a Phase II behind the headquarters expansion.

**So, Thinking and Acting Anew.**

Never look a gift elephant (or two) in the mouth. Having the entire former City Hall block shovel-ready for new courthouse development would greatly enhance the county's chances for state funding. A new 250,000 square foot consolidated courthouse would be a huge rock in the downtown pond economically and architecturally. And remodeling the old courthouse for the city's Phase II service needs would greatly benefit both parties.

### **Look homeward City Hall**

It's not well known, but the original City Hall sat on the corner of the N. Park Block at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. and W. Park from 1885-1914. And then in 1914, City Hall moved to 11<sup>th</sup> and Willamette for 50 years before it took over the whole block on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. between Pearl and High in 1964.

Now, 100 years later, circumstances have aligned and conspired to return a new City Hall to its N. Park Block home, a place it has always symbolically belonged, and where it can now become the leading partner in a market, park block, and civic center renaissance.