

The Runaway City Hall

The big surprise about the new City Hall at last week's (Wednesday, April 27) City Council workshop was not that the cost had climbed from the original \$15 million to \$25 million. The surprise was that the council voted not to pause and become more knowledgeable and accountable for the situation. Councilor Brown's motion to hold "at least one more session" on the project's budget, costs and financing went wanting when it failed to pass, garnering just three votes.

Some of the figures in the project costs breakdown that councilors had received just days before the meeting were as much as twice as high as previous estimates and expectations. The cost to tear down the old City Hall that was supposed to have cost \$1 million, turned out to have cost \$2 million. The council had not been informed.

Architectural and engineering fees were now up \$1.3 million to a total of \$4.4 million, which would amount to 18% of the \$25 million total projected cost. A class "A" office building's professional fees would normally be in the range of 8-10%. Fees for the new federal courthouse were around 10%. "Please," said an architectural friend and colleague with a bad case of fee envy, "get me one of these deals!"

It's sad that the designing of perhaps our most important community symbol has been conducted without any real citizen participation. What should have been an open civic process has been out of the public eye for long periods of time, and for far more than anyone was aware of, out of the council's oversight.

Why did it take the council a whole year to learn that the project was running seriously over budget? Where were the fiscal responsibility and the diligence that was due to question the cost increases for project management?

Why were there no regular monthly reports to council from the project's CMGC, construction manager general contractor, hired specifically to monitor and manage the project's costs during its design development, in the year since the council had agreed to increase the budget to \$17 million for a fourth floor?

There was no citizen's advisory committee formed to consult about the appropriateness of the building's design for Eugene or whether its earthquake preparedness should be set at a higher level than we build into our public schools.

There was no consultation in the space planning with such principle users as the city councilors as to whether or not they needed office space until long after the floor plans had been set.

There was never any plan to ask the citizens of Eugene whether they liked and wanted the building or whether they would be willing to pass a bond issue to pay for it the way we did for such others as the Hult Center and the Eugene Public

Library. But there should have been. This is the most secret and closely held public project in all of my 46 years in Eugene. Ironically its subject is our most public building and civic symbol.

So what was the big hurry at the council workshop? My guess is to skip as fast as possible over any unwanted sunshine on the consequences of some irresponsible project management. It's time now, past time, for a time out.

The only way to sneak this one's costs in under the radar now is to break the radar.