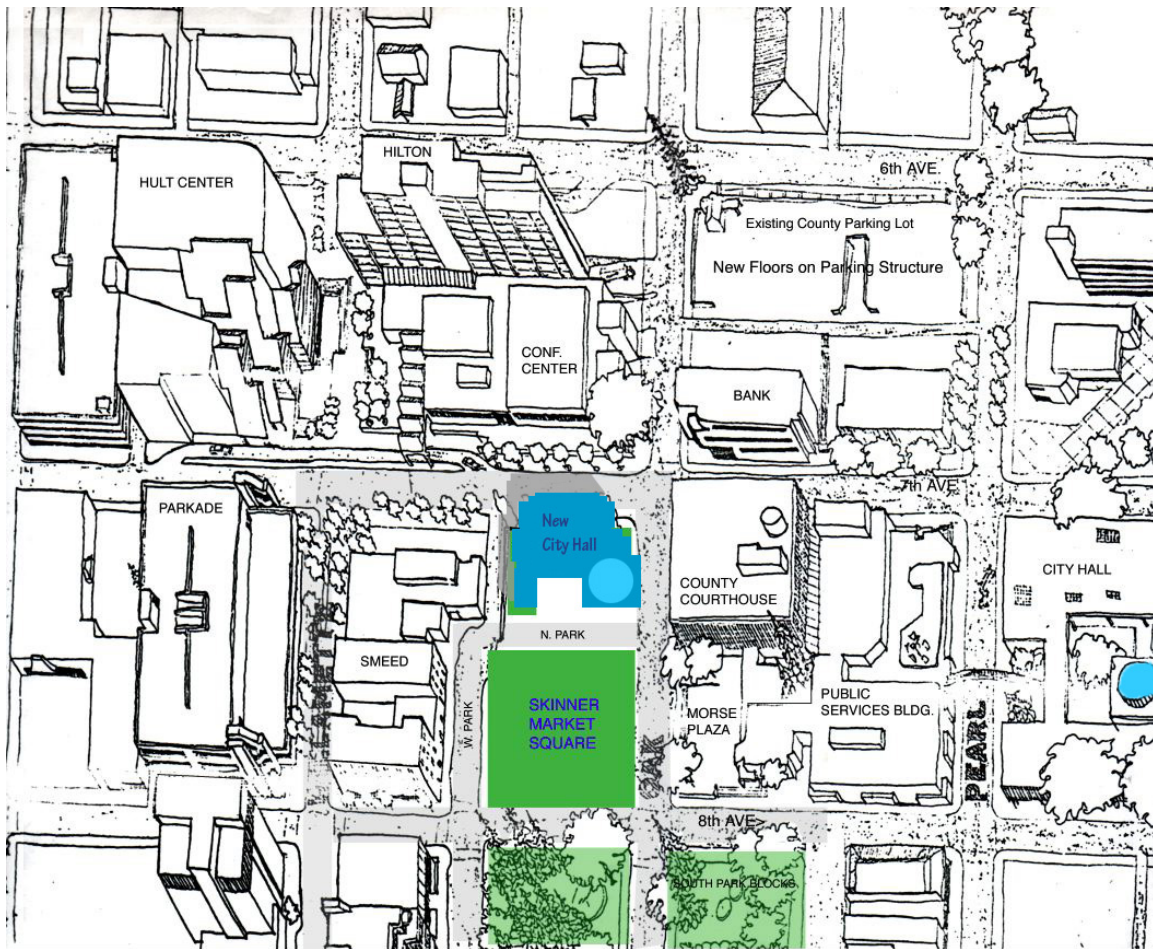


Design Matters

Feb. 27, 2014



The Third City Hall

I see the present City Hall design process in Goldilocks terms. The first one at \$130 million by THA from Portland was too big but initially in the right place. This second round is going to prove to be too small and in the wrong place. But if we're willing to stop and reassess, the third try could get it just right - the right building in the right place.

We've gone through this sifting process before with both the Eugene Public Library and our Hult Center for the Performing Arts. Each painful loss at the polls forced the necessary reconsiderations that eventually brought strong public support for two high-quality downtown buildings. I remember vividly when my old classmate, Norm Pfeiffer of the former New York firm of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, came to town

to tell Eugene that we deserved a performing arts center as good as we were – and we did. It was a stretch but we came together as a community, and we got it.

Remember the first library proposal. It was to occupy the first two floors of a proposed Pankow tower at 8th and Willamette. It didn't fly. And the second: the library was to be incorporated into a remodeling of the old Sears building. The nice renderings of wrap-around brick facades made the project appear respectable, but knowledgeable people, and especially librarians, knew in their bones that it was a mistake to try to shoehorn a 21st century library's needs into that old concrete bunker. The public, that's us, once again wisely demurred.

Like the previous buildings, I believe that any new City Hall should be financed by a public bond, not the present set asides of general funds that are presently needed to close the city's \$2.5 million budget gap. We should have learned by now that each major public building must earn and inspire real public support. Why would we demand less for our Eugene City Hall?

Going Back to Go Forward

THA's first City Hall site analysis and selection process looked carefully at all downtown possibilities and then selected two sites. First choice was the North Park Block, home of the Butterfly Garage, and second was the existing City Hall site. But first choice didn't work out. The main reason was that the building's program with all its police circulation, security and parking requirements just wouldn't fit. And so the attention shifted back to the original site, gave us the too expensive proposal and left us where we are today, not having sufficiently recognized that the situation has changed.

By moving the Eugene Police Department to their remodeled home at 300 Country Club Rd., the original City Hall program size has now been shrunk to fit. It has lost all the awkward weight around its middle that was forcing the project off its first and best choice. Everyone knows – well almost everyone – that City Hall has always wanted to be on the Park Blocks but never made it. And now with a little timely reconsideration, backtracking, and realignment of the consultant team, it can.

The Butterfly parkers can use the existing City Hall parking while the project is under construction and the community has more time to consider the older building's best repurposing.

A new stately City Hall along 7th Ave. on the north end of the North Park Block is what we really want and will support, one that opens to the south on a Market Square for the 5th St. and Farmer's Market and gives us the two-for-one of a restored park block and a City Hall that is as good as we are.

Maybe it will take another bond election loss to provide the kick-in-the-pants needed to get us there, but Eugene like Goldilocks, has shown before that it has the savoir-faire and resilience needed to get to just right.

Jerry Diethelm