WHY IS A PROPOSAL TO SAVE NORTH CAMPUS AND ITS TREES BEING IGNORED BY OREGON DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES (DAS)?

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Opinion, Opinion | 0 

ber 24, a tear in the civilized fabric of Salem-Oregon began. After meeting with the Governor last Friday, inspection of four historic buildings reveals that internal demolition has begun without proper vetting of the proposal.

Remember the original downtown Salem City Hall, its wonderful cornices and period architecture? Despite possibilities to repurpose and sustain this noble building – it was demolished.

Remember the more recent DAS sale of the Oregon School for the Blind property, after which 40 neighborhood trees were “clear cut”?

Contrary to those sad recollections, a group of 14 local businessmen and civic leaders have offered to purchase the North Campus of the Oregon State Hospital, parklike 47 acres with established trees and striking period buildings, north of Center Street. The “as is” proposal requires that DAS, responsible for surplus property sales, leave the buildings intact and that no trees be cut, as the City of Salem has already approved.

Their offer would save all the historic buildings, including the “Santiam Building”, famous for “One flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”; thus saving 507,000 sq ft of concrete structures to repurpose. Their offer apparently exceeds DAS 2014 property appraisal by $12 million.
Although the last four years have not revealed any interest in the property as bare ground, DAS is bent on demolishing the buildings and cutting trees to sell.

The issue is not just about sustainability of trees and historic properties; it is about DAS's lack of accountability, poor advice, and political cronyism contrary to Oregon law and fiscal responsibility. Here's a short history of DAS' imprudent planning:

On 2/21/2014, a preliminary proposal was for $2.4 million over the appraisal. All six buildings, a neighborhood playing field, and trees were sustained. DAS management ignored the proposal.

June 1, 2015, written testimony went to Joint Ways and Means Committee illustrating that $8.2 million to demolish would result in a potential loss of over $8 million State cash.

Later in 2015, DAS recommendation to demolish, was placed in a multimillion DAS package and passed.

October 7, 2016, a detailed news release was submitted to the Statesman Journal, “LOCAL GROUP SEEKS TO SAVE HISTORIC BUILDINGS—CREATE JOBS” describing the offer to purchase, save all buildings and trees and add new $150 million to tax rolls.

The Statesman has not printed this release. Why not?
Citizens need to expect accountable solutions in governments. This is one time that we may actually save historical buildings, use existing assets and support local taxes and business. Please contact the governor and representatives to advise, “Please stop the mismanagement and the cover up.”

*Gene Pfeifer, not a proposer, is a 47-year design build specialist, was Technical Advisor for the Courthouse Square, saved $23 million versus Portland's $60 million recommendation, and believes “True Sustainability Releases Funds for Priorities.” He can be reached at gene@innovdc.com.*