

From: [Ai-Lan Whitson](#)
To: [citycouncil](#)
Cc: [CityRecorder](#)
Subject: Public Comment for the February 10th Council Meeting regarding our Salem Livability Levy -
Date: Thursday, February 6, 2025 4:15:22 PM

Dear City Council Representatives,

I am aware that without the passage of the Livability Levy, and assuming no cuts to public safety services, it is likely that our library and senior center would have to close on July 1. Salem is the capital of Oregon. It would be shameful if Salem does not have a public library, especially since it was remodeled in 2021!

I love our library because it offers a plethora of community resources including education. This is why it is essential that we pass the Livability Levy on May 20th.

History shows that when two or more property tax measures are put on the same ballot, voters often reject them all. We saw this happen just last November in Independence where Chemeketa bond measure, the school bond measure and the library and parks levy were all rejected. I think this is likely to happen if the Chemeketa bond measure and the Livability Levy are both on the May 20th ballot. The Livability Levy cannot be put off until November. The Chemeketa bond measure can.

I respectfully asked you to vote in favor of NOT putting the Chemeketa bond measure back on the ballot for this May. I hope you will share this request with your fellow City Council members as well as asking your colleagues to vote in favor of NOT putting the Chemeketa bond measure back on the ballot in May.

Thank you for all your help to make our community one of the best livable places and for your service on the Salem City Council!

Take care, Stay well and Stay safe,
~ Ai-Lan (*Pronouns: She, Her, Hers*)

From: [Bill Dixon](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Cc: [Vanessa Nordyke](#)
Subject: Testimony Opposing A Five Year Operating Levy
Date: Friday, February 7, 2025 11:12:16 AM

My name is Bill Dixon. My wife and I live on Salem Heights Avenue in Ward 7. I write in opposition to item 5.d. 25-36 on the February 10, 2025 City Council Agenda: Consideration of a five-year operating levy to fund the Library, Parks, Recreation, and Center 50+. Such a measure would unduly burden already hard-pressed taxpayers and bypass much-needed public consideration of ways to balance general fund expenses with revenues

Regarding the tax burden: Salem residents already pay roughly \$4,000 per year on average in property taxes. This is a significant obligation in a community where personal income and household income lag the state and nation by roughly 15 percent. According to the city's own data, 50 percent of renters can't afford the amount they are paying. It would be logical to expect their landlords to pass on the extra property taxes in even higher rents. Twenty-five percent of homeowners can't afford their current costs, so an additional tax would be a special challenge for them. Burdening such residents with another cost (estimated at \$229 to \$257 per year to cover basic or enhanced services) would not be fair.

Regarding a public review of options: The levy proposal appears to be based on the premise that the status quo of city operations should be preserved. However, there has been next to no discussion of changing the status quo. For example, \$1 billion in property value sits in six urban renewal areas that will be at least 20 years old by 2026. The taxes from this property value are not available to finance general fund services such as police, fire, library and parks maintenance. Rather, they must be used to improve small areas of the city to the benefit of a small number of property owners. Would it be more efficient for the financial and operational health of the city to return this excess value to the general fund tax rolls – producing a gain of \$5.5-\$6 million annually in operating revenue to serve the needs of the entire city?

This is the kind of question that needs to be answered before asking voters for more money. An opportunity for the public to engage with such questions will occur when the Budget Committee convenes in April. This group includes business leaders and public-sector workers directly involved in budgeting for large organizations. Moreover, most committee members

have several years' experience analyzing the city budget.

The City Council should take more time to consider the financial stress its constituents face and the need for more public discussion of options before putting any tax measure on the ballot. Therefore, I urge the City Council to decline to refer a local option tax levy to voters at the May 20, 2025 election.

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Bill Dixon, 608 Salem Heights Ave. S., Salem, 97302

bill.r.dixon@gmail.com

503-602-1708

From: [Cara McFetridge](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Subject: I support levy option 2 for libraries and other services
Date: Thursday, February 6, 2025 7:23:45 PM

This is a comment for the public record. I want to register my support for either levy option but especially option 2, the tax rate of \$1.09 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Our libraries and parks are the soul of this town and perform countless vital functions for people of all backgrounds. We should be doing all it takes to ensure the survival of these institutions. If we can't manage that, we have a lot to be ashamed of.

From: [Christopher McFetridge](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Subject: Public Comment 2/11 council meeting: Levy Options
Date: Thursday, February 6, 2025 7:44:58 PM

I am a home owner who has lived in Salem for over a decade. Salem is a wonderful place to live and part of what makes it so special are the services provided to its residents. This include the availability and programming of both the 50+ center and *especially* the Salem Public library. I strongly support both proposed Levy Options 1 and 2.

My family and I use the library multiple times per week checking out physical materials like books, DVDs and CDs. The risk of losing this service worries me deeply. That being said, Library offerings and hours are even more critical for our vulnerable communities, many of which rely on the library for internet access, access to news materials, and at times simple shelter from the cold and rain our region gets for much of the year.

What makes the library special is the way it can function as a key service-hub for the entire community. On any given visit I have observed:

- * Students receiving tutoring in the library meeting rooms
- * Children enjoying story time and learning about the joys of reading
- * Families bonding while having a non-commercial outing
- * Patrons using internet access to check email, check in with friends, and even apply for jobs or benefits

Further reducing the Library's services will hurt current residents, damage the city's rising reputation and make Salem a less desirable place to live.

Sincerely,
Christopher McFetridge

From: [Denise Duren](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Cc: [citycouncil](#)
Subject: Support library, parks and senior center
Date: Thursday, February 6, 2025 2:30:36 PM

Dear City Council members,

We strongly implore you to save our libraries, parks and senior centers. These are the most cherished programs in Salem and what makes our community enjoy a high quality of life.

We ask that you request a levy to support these cherished programs. Thank you,

Denise and Christian Duren

" One of the hardest things to do in life is letting go of what you thought was real.", Buddha.

From: [Kaileigh Westermann](#)
To: [Paul Tigan](#)
Cc: [citycouncil](#)
Subject: Levy Comments from a Ward 1 Resident
Date: Friday, February 7, 2025 8:50:38 AM

Dear Councilor Tigan,

I read the recent article from the Salem Reporter that outlines the two levy options that the council will be voting on during the next meeting and I wanted to share my thoughts with you.

I previously discussed this with Virginia Stapleton, but I wanted to emphasize a key concern: the City Council has significant work to do in rebuilding public trust regarding this effort. The decision to move forward with the payroll tax without sufficient public awareness or a vote created a sense of distrust. While I personally supported the tax when it was on the ballot, many of my neighbors and friends voted against it—not because they opposed the idea, but because they lacked confidence in the process and the people behind it and I understand why. Even once the initiative was on the ballot, I heard next to nothing from the Council about it.

I highlight this because any future effort to ask residents to help address the budget shortfall may not succeed unless there is a dedicated effort to engage with the community, have transparent conversations, and rebuild trust. Without that groundwork, public support will be difficult to secure. I would love to see more work done to host open houses and listening sessions, to engage our community in these conversations. And this **MUST** go on the ballot or I fear deepening distrust of the Council.

Second, I did want to express my support for the levy with some apprehension. As I understand, there are two options, with the more expensive option that would cost households roughly \$250 / year. My family can afford \$250/year and personally, I would choose to pay more than that to increase library and park services. I would not support this levy if it meant a significant portion of the funds would go toward the police however. That being said, there are still many families in Salem that cannot afford another penny leaving their household.

I am wondering if there is a possibility of more of a sliding scale tax or a lower baseline tax with an option for contributing more for people who can and are willing to pay for it? A solution that would allow me, as a more privileged resident, to pay more to offset those that cannot pay. While I generally support and am willing to pay more for library and park services, if this does get on the ballot, I would like the City to do an assessment to better understand the impact that this levy would have on lower income households. Because while the tax is set for property value, it seems to not take into consideration income. And if this tax means placing any families under further financial duress, I cannot support it.

Sincerely,

Kaileigh Westermann-Lewis

Ward 1 - Northeast Neighbor Resident