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November 10, 2025

To City Council Members:

re: Agenda item 5c

The Salem Public Library system is a source of pride for all us. Our community recently acknowledged the importance of this community resource when they voted to pass the Salem City Levy a few months ago. However, the League of Women Voters of Marion-Polk Counties was disappointed when we learned about the recent changes to the fee structure of the library's community rooms.

Members of the League of Women Voters of Marion-Polk Counties worked very hard to support the passage of this City Levy. We staffed information tables, sent post cards, rallied on Liberty Street and even included a statement of support, published in the Voter Pamphlet. A result of the levy has been the additional hours of operation that have been added to West Salem and Salem City Library. We have hoped that adding evening and Sunday hours would encourage more community groups to use the meeting rooms and Louck's Auditorium for programs and concerts for the public

For many years the City of Salem waived the meeting room fees, for non-profit and government entities, if the meeting was free and open to the public. This practice served many community groups, who made programming available to the public, at no cost to the library. LWVMP is one of the groups that has relied on these meeting rooms. For years our League has held a monthly meeting, called Great Decisions in the Plaza Room. This group uses a study guide from the Foreign Policy Association to read and discuss issues on world affairs. The meeting is free, open to the public and usually has from 15-20 attendees.

But, since the recent adoption of Salem's new fee schedule, our League must pay \$32 to use this public meeting room for 2 hours, once a month. That may not sound like much, but Great Decisions meets for 8 months per year, making the cost of providing this once free community program \$256.00 per year. The new fee schedule requires us to pay 80% of the fee that is charged to commercial users.

Tonight, council is considering to further increase this amount charged to non-profits to \$17.00 per hour for the Plaza Room, or \$34.00 for each meeting. If passed, the charge will now be \$272.00 for the League to hold their 8-month Great Decisions program. This fee is in addition to the \$220 per year (on average) levy tax paid by each member who owns property in Salem.

Libraries promote a stronger and more informed citizenry when they provide free, or affordable, meeting spaces for local groups that are promoting social connection and civic engagement to the public. These meeting rooms serve as a welcoming outreach by the library to increase community involvement and support of public gatherings.

In just a few years Salem City officials may once again be turning to residents to extend the levy or support a library taxing district. In the meantime, it will be crucial for the city and library staff to build a broad base of support among community groups and residents. There are many local nonprofits and community organizations that could offer free lectures, book clubs, discussion groups, concerts, etc., at the library, if the room rentals were more

affordable.

We urge you to consider making a modification to the library rental room fees to ensure our community library is available for *all* of our community.

The Leadership Team of League of Women Voters Marion-Polk Counties,

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