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To: CityRecorder
Cc: citycouncil
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Testimony on Agenda Item 6c for 12/8/25 Meeting

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Mayor and City Council:

I wish to comment on Agenda Item 6c: Summary of recent activity and progress on the 2022 voter-approved Salem Safety and Livability Bond measure.

I was disappointed to see that no progress was made in 2025 on desperately needed branch libraries in Northeast and South Salem. I believe I see from the staff report that at least *some* progress was made on all of the other projects promised to voters in 2022 *except* branch libraries.

My disappointment stems from the fact that 3rd grade reading scores for 2024-25 recently released by the Oregon Department of Education indicate that many of Salem's children are experiencing what I would call a literacy crisis. Overall our 3rd graders had the lowest scores of any of the largest school districts in the state, with only 26% testing "proficient." And when you look at individual elementary schools in Northeast and South Salem the situation is even worse. Here are seven elementary schools in Northeast and South Salem where not even 20% of 3rd graders were able to pass the test:

Percentage of 3rd
Graders Testing
"Proficient"

Pringle Elementary School	19.8%
Lee Elementary School	17.0%
Hayesville Elementary School	16.9%
Cesar E Chavez Elementary	16.3%
Lamb Elementary School	14.6%
Hallman Elementary School	6.7%
Swegle Elementary School	5.6%

Could access to branch libraries have made a difference for these children? I think so. Just look at Portland, where there are 15 branch libraries that make children's literacy their top priority. In Portland Public Schools 55% of 3rd graders tested "proficient" in 2024-25

How many years are children growing up in Northeast and South Salem going to have to wait for a branch library? I have been told by a City staffer that the \$7.5 million that was included in the bond measure for libraries combined with affordable housing is not enough to do much more than acquire sites. I disagree.

What is needed is some creative thinking about public-private partnerships in which a public-spirited developer or two works with the City to collaborate on these branch library projects. We have a wonderful example of this kind of partnership in Cornelius, where several years ago now the City collaborated with a public-spirited developer to build their downtown library that combines the library with low income senior housing. Here is a fact sheet about that project:

Cornelius Public Library

A MODEL PROJECT COMBINING A LIBRARY WITH LOW INCOME HOUSING



- 13,500 square fo
- 35,000 sq. ft. low on two floors ab
- 45 mostly 1-bedr
- Project cost: \$17
- Cost of library: \$
- Project develop (Portland)
- Library open: Do
- Library staffing: 1
- Library operating

Keep in mind that this is a main library and not a branch library. A branch library in Salem would be about half the size of this library.

This project is similar to many mixed use housing projects such as we have seen in Salem in recent years, with the difference being that the ground floor is not retail space, but a library. As a result the library becomes something of a “marginal cost” and comprises less than half the cost of the project.

The Cornelius Public Library should be the model for branch library/affordable housing development in Salem. Surely we have public-spirited developers here who would be proud to bring much-needed library service to the children and families of Northeast and South Salem.

I would be happy to meet with Councilors interested in pursuing this idea. I would hope that in 2026 we do see progress on badly needed branch libraries in Northeast and South Salem. I also have ideas about how we could fund the operations of these branches that I would be happy to share.

Happy Holidays!

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