

## Does Clackamas County need a new event center?

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Idea pitched by Chair Craig Roberts Though Clackamas County commissioners worry about exacerbating the current fiscal crunch, the board is interested in at least exploring the idea of building a new center that could host large-scale events. The commission directed county staff during a meeting Tuesday, Sept. 16 to perform some preliminary research on where such a center could be housed, how big it would be, how much it would cost and other information.

Clackamas County Chair Craig Roberts pitched the idea to fellow commissioners, saying that it was disappointing that when he was sheriff he wasn't able to host the annual Child Abuse and Family Violence Summit locally, and had to find venues in Portland or elsewhere. He added that, while there are a number of places to host small events — and the county also has the Clackamas County Fairgrounds in Canby — there aren't many venues for larger events. "It was always frustrating to me that we couldn't host it here in our own county, to benefit our own county," he said.

Clackamas County staff noted that in recent years, Washington County embarked on a project to build a 66,000-square-foot facility that included an exposition area conference center. That center opened in 2020 and cost \$40 million. Roberts felt that along with bringing economic activity and visitors to the county, an event center could be a revenue generator. "I just think in this economic time, I realize things are tight, but this is when I think you need to look outside the box. Are there things you can do that are completely different that can help offset those costs?" he said.

According to a county staff report, "An event center could provide space for community gatherings such as weddings, concerts and other special events. Similar to the revenue the County gains from operation of the Stone Creek golf course, event center usage fees could be a revenue stream for critical County programs and services. Staff does not have sufficient data at this point to provide a detailed prediction of the event center's potential profitability." Some sites brought up at the meeting included the county-owned Stone Creek Golf Club in Oregon City, which is owned by the county, and Clackamas Town Center.

Commissioner Paul Savas and others worried about the cost of such an endeavor — including even the planning and design process — and Commissioner Ben West said he wanted more information on how much revenue such a space could generate. The commission will discuss the issue again at a future meeting.