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Andersen Proposal Calls For State To Pay For Public Safety Services Provided By Salem

Legislation would require state-owned, untaxed property in Salem to pay for public safety, fire, and first response services that the City of Salem provides.

SALEM, Ore. — Monday, **Rep. Tom Andersen** (D-South Salem), a first-term legislator and former Salem City Councilor, stood beside Republican and Democrat colleagues in the House and Senate to present legislation requiring that the State Legislature, the Department of Administrative Services, and the Oregon Department of Justice make direct payments to the City of Salem for public safety services they provide.

“There is \$1.8 billion worth of state property within the city limits,” said Andersen who first realized the issue of services going uncompensated for when he was a city councilor. “If this property were taxed, the City of Salem would get \$7.25 million annually in taxes. This is a focused, pragmatic solution to help address fiscal challenges faced by the City of Salem in providing essential services to our state government partners.”

The legislation will provide a payment to the City of Salem of about \$5-6 million annually. The value is calculated by taking the share of state land in the city and applying that share to the amount of money that the city spends on fire and first response services. The payments can only be used for public safety, fire, and first response and are intended to pay for the services that the state receives from the city.

“Property taxes that we collect fund about 77% of our police and fire; that means they don’t pay for everything that we do and our libraries, housing and homelessness services, and public works suffer,” said Mayor Chris Hoy, Salem’s Mayor. “I believe this legislation is a viable solution to help close the budget gaps that we have here now.”

Additional supporters of the concept joined the public hearing, including sponsors Sen. **Deb Patterson** (D-Salem), Reps. **Kevin Mannix** (R-Salem) and **Ed Diehl** (R-Stayton).

“The city provides police protection, fire protection, ambulance services, security during rallies at the Capitol, and other support to employees of state agencies and visitors to the Capitol City,” said Patterson. “None of the state agencies pay property taxes to support these varied services.”

“In 1989 the legislature appropriated \$500,000 dollars to the City of Salem in recognition of the emergency services, especially police and fire, which the city provides to the state,” said Mannix. “The police element relates to external demonstrations. The fire element is obvious. Today, the needs of the City of Salem are proportionately greater than they were in 1989 because property tax limitations in the intervening years have placed a greater limitation on the capability of the city to provide such services. I am pleased to join Representative Andersen and others to support this legislation.”

“Other businesses pay property taxes and it’s only fair that the State pays its fair share, which it currently does not,” said Diehl.

If passed, the legislation would initiate a program in the City of Salem that could someday serve as a blueprint for similar arrangements across Oregon to appropriately fund cities servicing our public buildings.

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