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## **South Portland Faces New City Hall sticker shock**

By JOSIE HUANG, Portland Press Herald Writer

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Early estimates of what it would cost to build a new City Hall in South Portland top \$8 million - far more than the city has in capital.

Even if the city chose to build a lesser-quality building of wood in two phases, it would fall short. "That would cost \$4 million (a phase), and we don't have \$4 million sitting here," said City Manager Jeffrey Jordan. That leaves the city at a standstill, yet again, over what to do about its aging, inefficient facility on Cottage Road. The City Council commissioned designs for a new City Hall more than five years ago, but a lack of funds delayed any action.

The proposal was revived late last year as city leaders discussed finding a new home for the planning, engineering and code enforcement departments. Each is now outside City Hall, in different buildings plagued by problems ranging from cramped space to mold and fire hazards.

Preliminary designs developed five years ago by ARCADD, a Boston-based firm, call for a three-story building of nearly 41,000 square feet to be built on the parking lot behind the current City Hall.

A building of metal and masonry would cost \$11.2 million if built in phases, ARCADD architect Hisham Ashkouri told city councilors this week. Using less-durable wood materials would amount to \$8.2 million.

Ashkouri said it would be cheaper to do one-phase construction and avoid retrofitting roofs and walls to accommodate new wings and floors..

But he recognized that cities and towns often do not have the cash upfront and said he knows that a developer will erect a building that a city can lease over a period of years. After essentially paying off the cost of building, the city would take ownership.

Jordan plans to deliver funding options to the City Council next month, after investigating ways the project could be scaled back. Even if the plan moves forward, Jordan said, residents will not see a new City Hall for at least a couple of years because of the time it takes to secure money, finalize designs, get permits and build.

The prospect of a long wait for a new building leaves councilors at odds over what to do about the satellite offices. Some would like to lease a newly available building at 62 E St. and consolidate the departments.

Councilor Rosemarie De Angelis would like to see the municipal offices kept in Knightville because the neighborhood "is what we consider to be South Portland's downtown . . . and it's our effort to establish a downtown identity."

De Angelis has requested a vote on the E Street proposal at the council's Jan. 19 meeting, but said the measure does not appear to have the four votes needed for passage. Several councilors have said they would rather invest in a new building than lease, because it is more economical in the long run.

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