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Boise mayor plans to sell city land for libraries

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Boise Mayor David Bieter said Wednesday he intends to sell several city-owned properties to pay for community libraries, and that leftover land could be used to pay for a new main branch.

The city plans to build four library branches in phases through 2010 for about \$12.2 million. Bieter said he plans pay for construction with part of the city's \$9.6 million in one-time surplus funds, as well as proceeds from the sale of city property.

Boise owns 316 acres of industrial land near Micron, 4 acres at 25th Street and Fairview Avenue, 7 acres at 30th and Main streets, 5 acres occupied by the old Boise Armory building, and a fire training facility along the Boise River, according to Bieter and city records.

The City Council first needs to resolve where to put a new police station, Bieter said. The 25th Street and 30th Street sites were both purchased for a station, though the city might purchase a new building altogether, he said. When that's done, the city can focus on selling its other land holdings.

"That is a good solid amount of inventory," Bieter said.

The city would probably not need to sell all of it to fund the branch libraries, he said. Leftover funds could be used to rebuild the main branch. That could be done as a public-private partnership, he said.

Bieter named workforce housing — housing priced to be affordable to those who make 80 percent to 140 percent of median income — a priority for Boise.

He identified the 25th Street, 30th Street, Armory and fire training sites as potential workforce housing sites. So are some elementary schools the Boise School District may decide to sell, he said. And so is the Boise Public Library site. If done in a public-private partnership, such as Mark Rivers' Library Blocks proposal, a mixed-use library project could contain workforce housing, Bieter said.

In addition to selling land to developers who would build workforce housing, the city could encourage businesses to adopt employer-assisted housing programs, Bieter said. In those programs, employers might give financial assistance to employees trying to buy a home close to work. The city could adopt its own program and lead by example, he said.

Another possibility is inclusionary zoning, which would require developers to include workforce housing units in their developments, Bieter said. That would be difficult, because the city of McCall has been sued over its inclusionary zoning ordinance and building contractors have voiced opposition to the idea in Boise, he said.

"I think even that can be done, but it's dicier," he said.

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