

## BUILDINGS: \$19 million to fix eight halls

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Liscum, chairman of the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Monument Group.

Liscum, who served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, said it might be prudent in Santa Rosa to "find another location and actually build another veterans hall."

The county report states that the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building, built in 1950, requires \$12 million for repairs and renovation, including seismic retrofitting, heating and ventilation improvements and a sound system upgrade. An additional \$7 million would be required to upgrade the other seven veterans halls in Cloverdale, Cotati, Guerneville, Petaluma, Sonoma, Sebastopol and Occidental.

With the exception of the hall in Occidental, all the buildings are being used by local veterans groups.

"I see it as a place where all veterans organizations can have a home," said Hattie Stone, a past post commander of the American Legion Post 21 in Santa Rosa.

Stone served stateside in the Navy during World War II as a communications supervisor at the former Hutchinson Naval Air Station in Kansas.

She said she knows that the buildings represent a financial burden, but that local veterans are owed at least a place to meet for having risked their lives in defense of the country.

"Many young men left their dreams of the future right there on the battlefield and many of them came back with broken bodies," Stone said.

Any talk of tearing down the Santa Rosa building should include building "something smaller or whatever they could get for their \$12 million or less," she said.

Jim Nagy, a Sebastopol native who was a Navy gunner serving aboard a merchant marine ship in the South Pacific during World War II, said state law guarantees local veterans groups be given a memorial hall or place where they can meet.

"It kind of makes me feel bad, because our veterans don't get enough as it is," said Nagy. "I think they should be kept if at all possible, whether it would cost money or not."

Nagy, who said he is battling lung cancer, said veterans have given so much that they "should have their due."

Sonoma County Supervisor Tim Smith, who represents much of Santa Rosa, said that's exactly what the county is trying to do. He said the recent report was a "hard-core examination" of what it would cost to overhaul the buildings and that supervisors are united in trying to figure out how to operate them more efficiently.

"We are certainly looking to make the situation better, not worse," Smith said. "And there's absolutely no consideration of demolishing or abandoning buildings. We look forward to working with veterans and the community to make sure that we've got facilities that we can all be proud of for years to come."

The county report speculates that the eight-acre Santa Rosa Memorial Building site could be converted to fairgrounds use or be a potential site for a minor league baseball stadium.

And Smith on Tuesday had noted that the property is "in a great location" that could attract private developers.

Smith said Wednesday that the county parks department will be scheduling meetings on the matter soon and that the supervisors will also hold "many meetings" to discuss the report.

Robert Safreno, secretary treasurer for the Sonoma County United Veterans Council, an umbrella group for local veterans organizations, said his organization just received the report and hasn't had time to review it.

Safreno said local veterans want to keep their buildings but the cost associated with maintaining the buildings is a real issue.

"We're highly concerned about it but none of us can afford to maintain them," he said.