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LEXINGTON

DPW facility takes a big step forward

The Boston Globe

By **Melissa Beecher**, Globe Correspondent | April 29, 2007

Applause erupted in Cary Memorial Hall on Wednesday night after Lexington Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly to move forward with building a \$27.5 million Department of Public Works facility on Bedford Street.

The vote was more than 30 years in the making, which led Town Meeting member Dawn McKenna to claim "this has had more process and scrutiny than any other building project in town history."

Still, before the project can break ground, it will need to pass a special ballot question in early June. If it is approved at the ballot box, the bidding process will begin immediately; construction could start as soon as this fall.

The project calls for an 87,000-square-foot building for all Department of Public Works operations. Currently, the administration and engineering departments work out of Town Hall, while the water and sewer, equipment maintenance, highway, and public grounds departments work out of Bedford Street. The new building would also house a consolidated facilities department to oversee all school and town buildings.

In addition to allowing the consolidation, the new facility would replace a 1940s-era building that is in desperate need of repair. Cars and trucks are parked bumper to bumper in a wooden garage that has holes in the roof and shaky beams. Chain-link fencing separates storage areas, and padlocks secure some of the most expensive equipment in town.

Department of Public Works Director William Hadley bluntly told Town Meeting members that it wasn't a safe place for his 60 employees to work. "This is the right-size building and the right time," he said of the proposal, "and tonight, you need to do the right thing."

Board of Selectman chairwoman Jeanne Krieger called the proposal a "no frills" plan to address serious problems. "We have waited too long for this building," she said.

The measure passed only after the original \$30.5 million design was scaled back significantly. In December, town officials pulled the project from a Special Town Meeting for further review. After working on improving energy efficiency, doing a cost-benefit analysis on housing vehicles inside as opposed to outside, and reducing the size of the

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structure by 14,000 square feet, the \$27.5 million project was brought forward.

Financing a \$25.2 million bond -- \$1.3 million has already been spent on design costs -- would be done over 20 years at an interest rate of 4.5 percent. In addition to increases to property tax bills, higher water and sewer fees would also pay for the new facility.

For a home valued at the town average of \$729,000, passage of a debt-exclusion override would mean an additional \$212 a year; \$160 in property taxes and \$52 more for water and sewer services. Over time, the costs will decline as the bond is paid off. In fiscal 2028, the average homeowner would be paying \$116 in combined taxes and rate increases for the project.

Town Meeting was receptive to the proposal. Many Town Meeting members have taken advantage of building tours that highlight the need for a new facility.

"The only word for it is 'deplorable,' " said Sheldon Spector, a Town Meeting member who said he was afraid to go inside the building after observing a support beam resting on a vehicle 10 years ago. "It was deplorable 20 years ago, and I can't think of another word for it now, except for worse than deplorable."

The plan did not receive unanimous support, however. Selectman Peter Kelley said the new design was missing a management plan to create a centralized facilities department between the school and town. Without knowing who would be working in the building, Kelley argued, the plan is flawed.

"I strongly feel for it to win support of the taxpayers, it must be a complete package," said Kelley. "At this time it is not."

Town Moderator Margery Battin called the voice vote for the project, saying that the needed two-thirds of Town Meeting members were in favor of the project.

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