

Bedford board votes to bond more for new township hall

■ Board members say the facility's \$2.8 million cost could be spread out over up to 80 years.

BY JOSHUA KENNEDY

For The Evening News

BEDFORD TOWNSHIP — Plans for a new Bedford Township Hall continue to evolve, but one thing is certain: It's going to cost a lot more than the \$1 million the board has stashed away for the project.

The panel in a 5-1 vote Tuesday approved a resolution of intent to bond for up to \$2 million more for the project. Clerk Robert Schockman cast the sole vote against beginning the bonding procedure.

"There is no doubt that this building is a complete wreck," he said while visually scanning the interior of the township hall board room. "When it rains, it either leaks or you cannot hear yourself think."

"My only objection is the current cost. It is tremendously expensive, I think."

The latest cost estimate for razing the existing hall at 8100 Jackman Rd. and constructing a new, two-story facility complete with an attached 2,700-square-foot sheriff's substation is around \$2.8 million.

Trustee Dennis Steinman, who is heading up work on the project, said it would cost about \$1.8 million to refurbish the existing hall, but that creates other problems, too. Renovation would mean

moving the township offices temporarily during the construction.

"It would also still be the same building," Trustee Larry O'Dell said. "You'd still have the same problems."

The board members said building a new facility allows the \$2.8 million price tag to be spread out over 60 or even 80 years.

"We only got 40 years out of this township hall," Mr. Steinman said. "We're looking over the life of the building and going for 60 or 80 years. It's going to last a long time. We're building a building that's going to last. Yes, it's going to cost a little more than we thought... But it's the right thing to do."

Plans for the building still are changing. They had included a sheriff's substation and emergency management center in the basement of the new structure, but drainage and flooding issues changed that.

A massive, sprawling one-story facility plan was scrapped in favor of two stories, each with about 8,800 square feet of office space. Compare that with the 8,554 square feet of the existing hall, and it's clear to see how big the township board members are considering making the new facility.

Previous township boards stashed away bits and pieces of unreserved fund balances for years to create a pool of about \$1 million for the construction of a new hall. The board in February unanimously accepted an offer from Monroe Bank & Trust to borrow what then was an estimated \$1.5 million.

That was on a 15-year pay-back schedule at about 4.6 percent. Today, the board intends to seek bonds for no more than 20 years at an interest rate of no more than 6 percent.

But the majority of the board members are standing by the constantly evolving plan to build a new hall.

"Yes, it is expensive," Trustee Rick Steiner said. "But this board is going to be very diligent. I think now is a good time to get up with the times and make this township run as efficiently as possible."

Trustee Paul Francis took time during board member comments Tuesday to chastise Mr. Schockman on his vote against the project.

"I'm disappointed that we couldn't come together and support this building unanimously," he said. "When it comes to crunch time and we're not united ... to me that sends the wrong message."

The board's adoption of the resolution of intent opens a 45-day comment period that also gives residents the right for a referendum on the matter. That means if enough residents — 10 percent of all registered voters — sign a petition against the bonding, the matter would have to be placed on an election ballot for consideration of the entire township.

Treasurer Sherri Meyer was not present.

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