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EWEB approves \$61.4 million complex

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Site preparation for a major building project in west Eugene is expected to begin in July following the Eugene Water & Electric Board's unanimous approval Tuesday of a \$61.4 million contract with a Portland general contractor.

EWEB commissioners approved the contract with Lease Crutcher Lewis, which will begin work this summer on the utility's new operations complex at the southeast corner of Roosevelt Boulevard and Belt Line Road.

Lease Crutcher Lewis has served as general contractor for several recent and current building projects at the University of Oregon, including the Lillis Business Complex, the Integrated Sciences Building and College of Education additions.

EWEB commissioners also approved paying an additional \$4.2 million, or \$9.7 million in all, for design work on the new complex performed by PIVOT Architecture.

Most of the design costs are folded into the \$61.4 million contract approved Tuesday.

EWEB plans to begin site work this summer and building construction next spring. The plan is to move operations employees into the new locale in the fall of 2010.

Administrative and customer service workers will remain at EWEB's riverfront property east of downtown.

Tuesday's actions came one week after opponents failed to gather enough voter signatures to refer to the ballot the question of whether EWEB should be allowed to spend up to \$85.5 million in revenue bonds for the project.

The referendum drive marked the first time an EWEB bond proposal had been challenged since the enactment of a 1993 state law that allows the utility to issue bonds with just the approval of the Eugene City Council.

The referendum campaign, had it been successful, would have delayed the project at least a year and pushed up construction costs by \$4 million to \$6 million, EWEB officials had said.

The failed referendum also means that the process of deciding how to redevelop about 20 acres of EWEB's choice riverfront property can go forward.

The acreage will be vacated once the utility's operations complex — vehicle shops, warehouse, operations building and storage yard — are moved to the new 52-acre site on Roosevelt Boulevard.

Commissioners last month selected five citizens who will serve on a nine-member panel charged with helping to guide the redevelopment. The City Council is slated to choose the other four members on Monday.

Critics' objections to the bond proposal included a rate increase associated with the project and the fact that the new complex is being built on wetlands.

EWEB estimates that the project's bonds will increase a typical residential customer's combined water and electric bill by 2.6 percent, or about \$52 a year.

That increase will be cut by about half, however, once proceeds from selling the utility's vacated riverfront property are applied to the project, EWEB officials say.

The utility plans to preserve about 4 acres of high-quality wetlands on the site and will restore 7 acres.

It also intends to spend about \$435,000 in the West Eugene Wetlands Mitigation Bank to buy or restore an additional 8.7 acres of wetlands elsewhere.

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