

# EWEB approves budget for complex

*The utility's new operations site is expected to cost \$83.5 million to construct*

By JEFF WRIGHT  
The Register-Guard

On a 4-1 vote, Eugene Water & Electric Board commissioners Tuesday found a price tag they could live with for building a new operations complex along Roosevelt Boulevard in west Eugene.

Endorsement of the \$83.5 million construction budget means the utility can go forward with design and financing work. EWEB wants to complete earthwork next summer and have the project done in late 2010.

The new complex will house EWEB's electrical, water and engineering staffs, and include a two-story operations building, warehouse, fleet building and yard. EWEB's administration buildings and steam plant will remain at its riverfront location east of downtown.

Commissioners have struggled for months to find an agreeable middle ground between those most concerned about cost and those keen on making sure the new complex is a leader in building sustainability.

Planners were able to reduce the original projected cost by 17 percent, mostly by reducing the square footage of buildings and opting for concrete tilt and pre-fabricated construction materials instead of structural steel and concrete.

In a compromise, nearly \$4 million in energy efficiency features and site design work, including wetlands mitigation, were added back to the project budget.

John Brown, one of the more cost-conscious commissioners, said he is satisfied with the cost estimates — especially after an independent team of contractors was allowed to review EWEB's budget assumptions.

"I'm comfortable and happy with where we are," Brown said. "We can go to the community and say, 'We've done a good job.'"

But Commissioner Ron Farmer voted against the motion, saying he is opposed to the add-backs. The additions really amount to about \$8

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million, not \$4 million, when taking 30 years' worth of interest payments into consideration, he said.

"I support the project, but I'm not going to vote to support these budget additions," Farmer said.

Farmer reiterated his hope

that the five-member board will feel able to support the project unanimously when it pursues bonding authority from the City Council.

The planned relocation translates to about \$64 a year in electric and water charges for the owner of a typical single-family home who pays around \$1,700 annually.

The planned relocation means efforts to redevelop any vacated acreage along the river can go forward. Proceeds from any sale would go toward paying off the Roosevelt site construction costs. EWEB and the city recently reached initial agreement on how to develop a master plan for the riverfront property.

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