

## The Register-Guard: *CityRegion: City/Region*

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### **EWEB relocation moves ahead**

By Jeff Wright The Register-Guard

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The Eugene Water & Electric Board moved closer Tuesday to re-locating its operation complex in west Eugene — and selecting a panel of citizens who will advise how to redevelop the utility's choice riverfront property once EWEB is gone.

EWEB commissioners voted 4-0, with member Patrick Lanning absent, to issue \$85.5 million in revenue bonds to pay for a new operations complex on Roosevelt Boulevard. The bonds must also be approved by the Eugene City Council, which is slated to review the request Feb. 13 and take action Feb. 25.

Under the state's Uniform Revenue Bond Act, EWEB does not have to refer the bond proposal directly to voters — unless 5 percent of the electorate petitions for such a vote within 60 days after the council's approval.

EWEB estimates that bonding for the new complex will increase customer rates by 2.25 percent, or about \$52 a year for a typical residential customer. That amount could be cut by nearly half, however, if EWEB ultimately sells the vacated property and applies the anticipated \$30 million toward relocation costs.

The Roosevelt Operations Center will include electric and water field operations, engineering, warehouse space, vehicle shops and a storage yard. Administrative and customer service functions, and the utility's steam plant, will remain at EWEB's existing headquarters along the Willamette River near downtown.

The new center will include a number of "green" elements, such as natural lighting and solar hot water heating, though other environmental features — such as rooftop photo-voltaic solar panels — have been eliminated in the interest of cost savings. Commission President John Simpson said he hopes the buildings' roofs will be designed to allow for the retrofit of such panels in the future.

Project manager Ken Beeson said EWEB has heard few objections from customers about the proposed move. Customers most often have said they want to make sure the project is economical and includes sustainability features, and that proceeds from the sale of riverfront property be applied to the project's cost, Beeson said.

The project is expected to cost \$83.5 million; the revenue bond request is \$2 million more because of debt service requirements and issuance costs. EWEB already issued \$8 million in revenue bonds in 2006 to pay for site acquisition and initial design, and the unspent portion of those revenues will be applied to construction costs.

EWEB wants to break ground in July and be ready to move in by late 2010.

Commissioners also reviewed plans to develop a master plan for the roughly 20 acres that will become available when EWEB's operations complex moves.

Applications will be accepted soon for a nine-member community advisory team that will help guide the process. Under an agreement reached last fall, EWEB will select five of the nine citizens, and the city will then choose the remaining four. Any Eugene resident or EWEB customer may apply.

Commissioners said it's vital to get a diverse group of participants with a range of expertise, and that EWEB be proactive in seeking applicants. "If we don't take this to the community, only a very small segment is going to come to us," Commissioner John Brown said.

EWEB wants to make its appointments to the advisory team in April. One of the group's first tasks will be to recommend criteria for selecting a consultant to help with the master plan.

The city's downtown plan sets several criteria for any redevelopment of the EWEB property, including allowing for open space and mixed-use development. The redeveloped site must be a "people place" with an educational aspect, and include setbacks and design techniques to address environmental concerns.

Simpson alluded to both the operations complex relocation and the riverfront redevelopment in his State of the Utility address, citing them as among several major initiatives coming to fruition in 2008. Others include obtaining a new operating license for the Carmen-Smith hydroelectric project on the upper McKenzie River, and building a new boat ramp on Leaburg Lake, he said.

The utility is committed to increasing citizen involvement in its decision-making, Simpson said. One example, he said, is to keep Bethel area neighbors informed about traffic, construction and wetlands ramifications when work begins this summer on the new operations center on Roosevelt.

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