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MAYNARD

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Supporters line up for police project

By Melissa Beecher, Globe Correspondent | May 17, 2007

In his nearly three decades with the Maynard department, Police Chief Jim Corcoran has sat on four public safety building committees that talked about upgrading the department's facilities. This one, he says, will be his last.

"When all this started a year ago, I wasn't optimistic. I really thought, 'Here we go again,' " he said recently. "But after working with this 12-member group, I really believe this time, it'll happen."

On Monday, Town Meeting is slated to decide whether to borrow \$4.8 million for improvements to the police station, firehouse, and several school buildings. Of the total bond authorization figure, \$3.9 million would go toward transforming the old library next to Town Hall into a new police station.

The Police and Fire departments share a Summer Street building that was constructed in 1955. Corcoran said that it has been plagued with problems since his rookie year, 1979. Even then, he said, the heating system was on the fritz; the evidence room was a segment of the dark basement separated by two-by-fours and chicken wire; anyone who could not make it up the stairs leading to the front door had to be met outside.

And 28 years later, he said, it's the same story, as voters have repeatedly shot down proposals to address the problems.

But with no organized opposition and the support of every major board in town, police feel this may just be their year. Officers have volunteered to hand out informational brochures and those on duty welcome the chance to give tours of the station. The Public Safety Building Committee has created a website, maynardpublicsafety.com, that details its findings, offers a virtual tour of the building, and allows visitors to calculate the average tax increase -- yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily -- for their property if the proposal is approved.

The building renovations would be funded through a debt-exclusion override of Proposition 2 1/2, creating a temporary tax increase that would expire when the bonds are paid off in 20 years. If approved by Town Meeting, the proposal would require approval by voters townwide on June 12.

The plan calls for the Fire Department to take over the entire Summer Street building, where \$200,000 would be spent to replace the boiler.

The school district has asked for \$580,000 for improvements -- mainly heating and ventilation repairs -- to Green Meadow Elementary School, and a \$140,000 boiler for Maynard High.

The debt exclusion would add roughly \$95 a year to the tax bill of a home with the average assessed value in town, \$354,000, according to Maynard officials.

Selectmen and Town Administrator John Curran say the combined bond issue would be the most efficient way to deal with Maynard's overwhelming facility needs. Curran's mantra over the last few months has been that "all projects are critical this year."

"We are putting money into stopgap repairs each year that are simply a waste of time and money, and residents have come to us tired of it," said Selectman Bob Nadeau. The override "is our chance to finally address these issues before they become so cost-prohibitive that we never do anything until someone gets hurt."

Superintendent Mark Masterson said consultants and engineers who have reviewed Maynard High School and Green Meadow Elementary have found a "horror show of facility problems." Masterson said that in the past school leaders have put off building repairs to prevent teacher layoffs and program cuts.

"The time has come to re invest in the community," he said. "Quite simply, Maynard cannot continue this way."

Town Meeting is to begin at 7 p.m. Monday in the Fowler Middle School, 3 Tiger Drive.

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