

## **Alameda city officials moving on new emergency operations center**

**Peter Hegarty, Bay Area News Group, 9-28-13**

ALAMEDA -- City officials hope to break ground on a new emergency operations center this spring in the wake of the City Council moving forward with securing bond money to finance the project.

The center, which is projected to cost about \$2.8 million, would be built at Buena Vista Avenue and Grand Street near the old Fire Station 3. The council voted Sept. 17 to secure the money by extending and refinancing lease revenue bonds, or Certificates of Participation, that were originally issued in 2002 for seismic and other upgrades at City Hall.

"Once we have the money, we are going to start going forward," City Manager John Russo said. "We have plans. We have everything ready. We just need to get a contractor on board to get going."

The work could begin as early as this spring, Russo said. The council's decision to replace the current emergency center in the Alameda Police Department basement follows city voters rejecting a ballot measure in June that would have raised the local sales tax to pay for the project.

The half-cent increase under Measure C also would have helped pay to replace Fire Station 3 on Grand Street, which has been closed for more than a decade because the building is not earthquake-safe.

Currently, firefighters assigned to the station work out of a neighboring former family home that the city rents. They mostly handle calls from the center of the Island.

Supporters said Measure C was essential for public safety, but opponents said the emergency center and other projects were not necessary and that raising the sales tax would discourage shoppers and undermine business, especially in a sluggish economy.

While refinancing the 2002 bonds will cover the cost of the new emergency center, it will not provide enough money to also pay for a new fire station, Russo said. The cost of replacing the shuttered station could be as much as \$7 million, according to city officials.

The certificates issued in 2002 were for about \$11 million, and about \$7 million remains on the unpaid principal, which is due in 2025. The plan approved by the council Sept. 17 will allow the city to obtain an additional \$3 million and would extend the payments by five or eight years, depending on the interest rate.

The payments will be about \$828,000 annually, said Fresh Marsh, the city's finance director.

"We want to get in there and take advantage of it now," Marsh said, noting that interest rates are currently low.

The payments will come from the general fund, but the outlay is not expected to cause any additional deficit since the proposal approved by the council essentially continues an arrangement that began more than a decade ago. The city hosted a series of community meetings, including one in July at Mastick Senior Center, to gather input on the future emergency center and fire station, including possible building designs.