

Exeter Town Hall meeting
By Leesa K. Bartu

How much will it cost? Will my property tax go up? How will the current interest rates affect the bonds? What will the pool look like?

A packed house at the Exeter fire hall Wednesday evening was looking for answers to these and other questions at the Exeter Town Hall meeting.

The Exeter Pool Committee organized the event to let citizens air any questions or concerns they have about the two May 13th ballot issues, the pool bond and the sales tax. This was also an opportunity for the citizens to get a first hand look at a proposed pool design as well as sales tax and property tax figures.

The committee invited members of the Exeter Village Board and Maintenance Department to be on hand to answer questions along with representatives from bond issuers and the firm who has designed the proposed pool.

After a welcome by pool committee member Hope Androyna, committee member Brian Murphy shared a power point presentation highlighting the positives and negatives of the current pool and building a new pool.

On the plus side, the pool has lasted well beyond its 20 year life expectancy, many children in the community have learned to swim, it has provided job opportunities and it has brought people to the community. "Many people see a town with a pool as a progressive town, somewhere they want to raise their children," said Murphy.

In its current state the pool has some very big negatives all relating to its age. It was built in 1964 and its intended use was 20 years. Pictures of the current state of the pool were displayed highlighting the disintegration of the pool, much of which is visible only when it is empty.

Taking the age of the pool into account, safety seems to be one of the biggest concerns. The cracks and the roughness in the bottom of the pool are sharp enough to cut feet. The unevenness of the cement on the surrounding deck is a constant fall risk.

The cracks in the bottom of the pool have also been a source of water concerns. With Exeter's high water table in that area of town, groundwater has been entering the pool pushing up through the cracks. As the summer heat pulls moisture out of the ground it also pulls pool water back through those cracks into the ground. This last summer the only way the proper level of water could be maintained was to have a hose running in the pool 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Murphy estimated that the hose ran over one million gallons of water into the pool this summer.

Rising costs for maintenance of the pool, the inefficiency of the current equipment and the added chemical costs because of the extra water it takes to keep the pool full, are also negatives of the current pool.

Another area of concern is the age of the bathhouse structure. Along with deterioration due to age, vandalism has taken its toll on the building. In several areas, blocks are broken which may have weakened the structure. Murphy

explained that a current bill in the legislature, which would regulate buildings like the bathhouse, would probably close Exeter's building down.

The bill for a new pool might be big but the positives are big, too. The pool and the bathhouse would be up to current standards, as well as having new efficient pump equipment that would reduce operating costs. The town would continue to have the positive affects of having a place for children to learn to swim in town, work when they get to be teenagers, and a general place for recreation in the summer. One of the highlights presented was keeping people in town so that they can continue to spend their money in town.

The presentation then moved on to funding and how the two issues on the ballot will work together. The bond for the pool is set at 1.3 million, which the committee emphasized, was a high number. The village board has set that amount, higher than the estimated cost of the pool to ensure that any unforeseen costs are covered.

At the current low interest rates, the estimates show that property tax of those who live within the city limits would be an additional \$246 for a home valued at \$50,000. If there were less bond funds taken then property taxes would be less. The levy at the current bond rate of 4.4% would be .4928 per \$100.

The presentation then turned to alternate ways of paying for the pool. The other ballot issue is the city sales tax of 1.5%. Committee representative Murphy stated "A city sales tax would reduce the property tax by about half and spread the cost of the pool to people who use the pool but live outside the city limits. Not just the property owners in town who would be paying for this, people buying in restaurants or in town would be additional revenue from outside sources."

In 2003 Exeter had \$3.7 million in net taxable sales and in 2006 \$4.15 million. Alan Emshoff, another pool committee member commented this "shows Exeter's strong solid business community. Many towns in our county have not seen the economic growth like Exeter, they have either remained stagnant or some have even declined."

At these rates in 2003 the extra city sales tax would have produced \$56,000.00 in additional revenue while the 2006 figures would have gained the village \$62,000.00 more in funds. Almost every other town in the area already has incorporated the additional city sales tax. At a recent board meeting the Exeter Village Board decided that even if the pool bond passes, without the city sales tax they would most likely take the option as the issue is worded to not build the pool.

The committee is also looking into some grant options for funding the pool, but at the most those would still only cover about 30% of the cost of the pool. One of the next steps they hope to initiate is an Exeter Village Foundation, similar to the school foundation, to help solicit donations for the project. One of the keys to securing some of the grant monies is to have positive community interest indicated by personal financial donations.

Alan Emshoff, another pool committee member introduced himself and then opened the question and answer period. Some of the first questions were in relation to the bond issue so Emshoff introduced Tyler Williams and Tom Sorensen, representatives from Edward Jones, who have in the past,

underwritten all of the bonds Fillmore County issues.

Williams emphasized that these will be maintained locally (in Geneva), "the funds will stay in the community."

Some of the questions raised by the audience for Williams were about the bleak financial forecast. "What if the interest rate goes up? Will the bond interest rate go up?" He emphasized that the bond rate will be locked in for 20 years.

Bob Mueller, another pool committee member directed the crowd's attention to the sample schedule Williams brought for a \$900,000 bond, "at the 1.5% sales tax of \$62,000.00 the payments of \$67,000 to \$72,000 would be close to a wash - the sales tax would almost pay for a pool. Tax needed over that would be very minimal."

Audience members also asked when and if the extra sales tax would end. According to the wording of the ballot, explained Emshoff, the sales tax issue does not have an ending date. As it is written it could be used for property tax relief, community improvement or bond payments.

With the bond questions answered the focus shifted on the mechanics of building a new pool. David Henke, aquatic department manager for JEO Consulting Groups, Inc. distributed handouts with the proposed pool drawings and layout.

The new pool would feature a zero depth entry, two diving boards and a circular slide. According to Henke, "The pool would be in almost the same location, to keep from having to move the playground equipment we would have to lose a few trees, but trees and pools do not get along."

When asked about the cost of pools, Henke stated the facts, "Pools costs about \$200 per square foot. The pool we have designed is 2600 square foot, which alone would cost \$520,000. With the bathhouse as designed and estimated, the cost would be \$940,000."

Henke emphasized to the attendees that some of those costs could be taken care of by the residents of the village. Community involvement in some aspects of demolition and construction could bring down the costs of the pool construction.

One of the primary reasons the pool would be located in the same place is because all of the sewer and water lines are already there for the bathhouse. Henke was asked about refurbishing the pool we have and stated that he "would not recommend it. It is one of the worst looking pools, and I have looked at over 300 pools, that I have ever seen."

"If you tried to sandblast the pool in its current state I estimate you would lose about six inches of concrete off of the surfaces," said Henke.

To keep costs down, Henke stated that "we like to draw plans a general contractor can build" avoiding specialized pool builders who aren't plentiful in Nebraska. Henke also explained that a pool could be built without losing a pool season, "They can close the pool August first and the contractor can work during the dry months and have it finished by June first with the design we have."

Using a general contractor, there was a question from the audience about any warranty for the pool. Henke assured that any reputable contractor would give "a one year warranty from the date that the Village accepts the pool."

Generally they will give you two full pool seasons to work out any bugs.”

Emphasized during the evening were several factors in the current financial climate that make this an opportune moment to build the pool. “With interest rate cuts we will be able to build it for considerably less,” said committee member Murphy. JEO representative Henke along with Edward Jones representative Sorensen noted the lack of construction work for contractors right now, making them “hungry for work,” and submitting lower than estimated bids.

Emshoff closed out the town hall session with a request, “We hope you will return here (the fire hall) on May 13 and vote both for the pool bond and the sales tax bond.”

Serving on the Exeter Pool Committee are Hope Androyna, Sharla Dinneen, Alan Emshoff, Ed Mark, Bob Mueller, Brian Murphy, Lin Schlueter, and Rhonda Stokebrand.