

August 22, 2007

## Webster residents reject \$15M center

**Voters shoot down proposal to build \$15 million community facility; supervisor has no 'Plan B'**

*James Hawver, Staff writer*

Residents rejected a \$15 million plan to build a new community center in Webster with a narrow 1,631 to 1,570 vote Tuesday night.

"I really don't have a Plan B right now," Supervisor Ronald Nesbitt said when the result was announced shortly after 9 p.m. to a small crowd gathered at Willink Middle School where residents voted.



Election inspectors check in Webster residents by street name during the vote for a new \$15 million Webster Community Center on Tuesday at Willink Middle School.

The proposal's price tag seemed to be opponents' main concern, Nesbitt said. If the plan had passed, the owner of an average home assessed at \$160,500 would have paid \$37.59 per year for 25 years. Nesbitt said he doesn't have any specific plans yet, other than to reconvene the 35-member committee that worked on the project.

"I really don't want to put \$6-, \$7-, \$8 million into a 50-year-old building," he said of the possibility of renovating the current community center.

The new facility would have been built on the town's 32-acre lot on Ebner Drive behind the Ridgecrest Community Center, which was slated to be torn down.



Election inspector Joyce Rice of Webster, right, waits while Jen Lewis of Webster votes at Willink Middle School on Tuesday.

A 2005 assessment commissioned by the town reported that the Ridgecrest center would need at least \$6 million worth of renovations to get the building in compliance with codes. Nesbitt said the \$6 million wouldn't include any of the additions that he wanted to see in the project.

Scaling down the project may be the best bet to gain the public's approval, Nesbitt said.

The two-story, 56,400-square-foot center would have included a fitness center, a track that wraps around an 8,000-square-foot gymnasium and multipurpose rooms to house community groups and programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department.

Fifty paper ballots were filled out by voters who did not present photo identification. Those ballots will be sent to the board of elections to be verified and counted. But that's not enough to change the outcome.

A sampling of voters leaving the polls Tuesday night demonstrated their diverse views on the proposal.

Supporters said the new center would improve the overall quality of life in Webster.

But they were slightly outnumbered by opponents, who claimed the proposal was too ambitious.

"We don't need to build a monument to our town supervisor," said Charles Watson, 58. "Money is like drugs to politicians — they can't get enough, and they can't spend it quick enough."

[JHAWVER@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:JHAWVER@DemocratandChronicle.com)

### **What's next**

Webster residents rejected a \$15 million plan to build a new community center with a 1,631 to 1,570 vote Tuesday. Supervisor Ronald Nesbitt said he will reconvene the 35-member committee that worked on the proposal, but he has no further plans. Spending a minimum of \$6 million to get the current center up to proper building codes is a bad option, Nesbitt said.