

Voters OK Fondulac District Library referendum

By Leslie Fark
of the Journal Star

Posted Apr 08, 2009 @ 01:02 AM

EAST PEORIA — Residents in the Fondulac Library District approved a referendum Tuesday to build a ultra-modern library to replace its current cramped and outdated facility by issuing \$7 million in bonds.

Voters supported the proposal by 52.7 percent, or 1,519 votes, to 46.6 percent, or 1,323 votes, a 196-vote difference.

"We're very excited, very relieved," Justin Hale, library board president, said Tuesday night. "We all put a lot of hard work in this and it all paid off."

The vote means the owner of a home valued at \$100,000 would expect to pay about \$40 a year more in library property taxes.

While rough drafts of the new 32,000-square-foot facility have yet to be finalized, Hale expects to break ground in September. The new library would become part of a City Hall/cultural center development in the city's Downtown 2010 project.

The move to the new site would mean employees no longer have to work in storage closets and trod over wet carpet when it rains.

Since its founding in 1935, the library has moved 10 times and never resided in a building designed for library use. Its current home at 140 E. Washington St., a former bank branch, is 12,500 square feet and sees 128,350 people walk through its doors annually.

"We have never had a true home," Hale said. "It's a relief that we're going to finally have a facility that's meant to be a library. I'm excited for the staff at the library. I'm excited for the entire community."

This is the second time district officials turned to taxpayers for help in funding a new library.

In 2007, the district asked in another referendum to raise the property tax rate from 30 cents to 65 cents per \$100 assessed valuation to construct a new \$11 million, two-story library on the site of the current facility. That library, nearly four times larger than the existing one, with 46,000 square feet, would have cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$190 a year in taxes, a \$120 increase. The referendum failed 58.8 percent to 41.2 percent.

Leslie Fark can be reached at 686-3188 or lfark@pjstar.com.