Public safety building bond unlikely to pass

Sheehan says she will not vote in favor of combined building; Mullock says it's overpriced

By JACK FICTHER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A positive vote by four members of City Council would be necessary to approve a bond issue to finance a new fire station and police station.

During a council meeting Aug. 13, City Councilman Zack Mullock said he would not vote in support of a bond ordinance.

"From where I stand with the bond, I would not be that fourth vote to get that bond, as it stands now, with putting the police station and fire station together where the firehouse is now," he said.

Sheehan said in order for police and the fire department to have a building that could be expanded in the future, two separate buildings would be needed.

"We should not be building for now, we should be building for the future," she said. Mullock said she feared that two- to three-story building would run the streetscapes of the neighborhood.

Councilman Jack Mullock said the city is four years into the project with the Public Safety Building Advisory Committee in existence for two years.

"To the point, we would have had multiple town hall meetings by this time," he said. "We've already moved town hall meetings in regard to the building.

Mullock said cost estimates for the building from U.S. architects ranged from $18 million to $23 million, including architectural services, as well as structural, electrical and plumbing services.

When figures were submitted by U.S. Architects that exceeded the city's expectations, a council meeting scheduled for Aug. 13 to present concept plans was canceled in a 2-3 vote, with Sheehan voting to hold the meeting.

Sheehan said cost estimates for the fire and police station were based on a repetitive loss home. For a repetitive loss, FEMA will pay 75 percent. The councilman said a repetitive loss home was one that has experienced 90 percent of the lifting cost. FEMA will pay for the lifting, the home lowered onto it, as well as new steps and decks built.

"Your house is now mitigating all future flood damage," he said.

A home is being raised on Jefferson Street at Beach Avenue in Cape May. The process requires the home to be jacked up, the original foundation demolished and rebuilt to the new base elevation, then it is lowered onto it, as well as new steps and decks built.

With flood insurance premiums expected to become much more expensive in the next few years, it may make financial sense to raise your house to above base flood level.

A bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill, D-Cald, could allow flood insurance premiums to rise as much as 10 percent per year on primary homes and a high as 25 percent on second homes.

A bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., caps annual premium increases at 10 percent for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Hauck said it is expected that if the bill becomes law, flood insurance would be affordable.

"Severe repetitive loss, or losing the property to the insurance carrier's, would ruin the streetscape of the neighborhood," he said.

He said his company's projects ranged from $18 million to $23 million, including professional services, such as architecture's fees and the interior professional services, such as electricians and plumbers.

The cost of lifting a house is not just raising a home to a higher elevation, "It's building a foundation, it's building new decks and new steps and rebuilding the water lines, the electric," Hauck said.

"We call that the cost of doing nothing," he said. "What's the cost of doing something?" He said the cost of a repetitive loss home was $120,000. Flood insurance in the future could cost $1,000 per month, but if your house is above base flood elevation, flood insurance premiums could be reduced to as little as $600 per year.

"Your house is now mitigating against any flooding and that four pass away for us, and also you increase the equity in your property by lifting it up, it's worth more," he said.

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