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Forks plans \$3.2 million public works building

Officials say refinancing debt will soften blow for taxpayers.

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The Forks Township public works building on Frost Hollow Road dates to 1954, and it's beginning to show its age. Septic systems back up and flood the small lunch room, cement walls have major cracks and cramped quarters in storage rooms and work bays put employees in danger.

With evidence of the problems, and a number of safety violations noted at the facility, supervisors Thursday voted to approve an estimated \$3.2 million new building and refinance the township's debt to pay for the project with little impact on taxpayers.

"We're asking to do this now because we feel market rates are in our favor to save some money," said finance manager Jim Farley. By locking in current bond rates, the township could complete the project and add only \$22,000 to \$25,000 in annual debt payments, Farley said.

Supervisors on Thursday also agreed to request proposals for the architecture and engineering of the building.

Problems at the existing facility include workers welding next to oil barrels, stacked tools at risk of falling and maintenance trucks being washed without properly collecting the water, violating environmental standards, said Public Works Director Mark Roberts.

In terms of equipment, machinery that cannot fit inside the garage bays has been damaged because the township has had to store it outside, Roberts said.

Officials suggest building the facility at one of two locations: a 52-acre tract at Newlins and Richmond roads, zoned for residential development, and 23 acres at Braden Park south of the airport, zoned for commercial employment.

The township prefers the Newlins site because of height, light and planting restrictions near the airport. But residents near the Newlins tract spoke Thursday about concerns from noise to diesel fumes.

"Especially in a residential neighborhood, these things could be a problem," resident Jeff Braido said.

More than 200 residents in the Vista Estates development also oppose the Newlins and Richmond road location, said Rick Petro, spokesman for the homeowners.

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