

STAR NEWS

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YMCA wins Elk River's approval

by [Jim Boyle](#)

Editor

Members of the YMCA Community Board didn't break out in song with the Village People's 1978 rendition of "Y.M.C.A.," but they did celebrate victory at the polls with cake and ice cream last Thursday before their regular monthly meeting.

This meeting, which was held outside at Lions Park Center, was far from regular, as they were talking about the future YMCA community center and not a proposed YMCA that has been the focus of the group for the past six years.

Voters last Tuesday narrowly approved the \$12 million facility on 1,608 to 1,466-vote in an election that clearly showed the YMCA was the top drawing card on the ballot. Only 32 people who went to the polls in Elk River didn't cast a vote on the issue.

"We were looking for a gauge, and I think we got that," Elk River Mayor Stephanie Klinzing said.

Ron Touchette, vice-chair of the community board, said what supporters have accomplished is not just a new building for the community, "but far more importantly a yes vote for all of the kids, families, seniors and everyone in between that make up our community.

"The benefit to our community is not even calculable today," Touchette said last week. "This is a step forward that will allow all residents to use it, from the well-off to the not-so-well-off."

Touchette described the future YMCA as a place for the family unit to go, something he said that many find they now have to go outside of Elk River to do.

Klinzing said she believes people expressed how they felt, and those that didn't turn out weren't so dead set against it or thought it was going to pass and were willing to let others decide.

The close vote was highlighted by a battle in Precinct 2A at Meadowvale Elementary, which ended in a deadlocked vote of 250 to 250. (See voting results below.)

Facility could open in early part of 2008

The Elk River YMCA could be operational as early as early 2008, depending on how much work gets done yet this fall. The wheels are already turning.

The framework has been established, and now the details must be worked out.

Ultimately, the city of Elk River will own the facility and have its Economic Development Authority lease it back to YMCA Metropolitan of Minneapolis.

The YMCA, in turn, will pay for one-third the cost to develop the facility and will run the center and its trademark brand of programming aimed at building strong kids, strong families and strong communities.

Elk River residents will pick up the other two-thirds with a tax levy to develop the facility, and people will access it through monthly membership fees or scholarships.

The owner of a home valued at \$250,000 can expect to pay at most \$86.28 a year or less than \$8 a month.

The city of Elk River presented taxpayers the highest possible tax impact, but city officials note that the impact will be lessened immediately as new businesses like the Target and United Health data centers come on line.

The city is also looking at making application for \$2 million to Sherburne County to assist with the cost to construct the facility and strive to make it fit in with Elk River's Energy City.

"We laid out worst-case scenario," Klinzing said. "We had to do that."

The mayor said she never sensed any opposition to a Y, just the cost of having to build it. There were not believed to be any campaign efforts to defeat the project.

Voter turnout in city

Statewide turnout was about 16 percent. In Elk River, it ranged from 24 percent in Precinct 4B to 32 percent in Precinct 1A, with 26 percent overall.

"Because of the local issues, it brought more people out," said Sherburne County Auditor Treasurer Ramona Doebler.

Turnout in Sherburne County was 14 percent. That compares to a 7 percent in the 2004 primary in Sherburne County and 13 percent in 2002 primary, Doebler said.

Of the eight precincts weighing in the election, four voted in favor of the YMCA and three voted against.

Community Board members knew it would be a close vote, including Cedric Olson, the retired Central Lutheran pastor of 31 years who has been on the community board since the spring of 2001.

"There are those persons who have real concerns about how much more can be added to the tax load," he said. "I understand that kind of a thing. There are a lot of people on fixed incomes.

"At the same time I am really convinced when you look at the purpose, aim and mission of the YMCA this is a the ultimate gift to a community to have this kind of leadership and direction that can be supportive of the whole community and all ages," he said.

Bill Helliwell, an NRG executive who lives out of the area and who has been leading the YMCA Community Board for six years, was thanked last week as were all board members, Friends of the Y, citizens, and businesses, the YMCA of Metropolitan and anyone else who helped the cause.

Helliwell said his drive for this project came from a desire to give something back, to assist the families at his place of employment, who he saw rise and fall with the success and tragedies of the community. He wanted a place families, children, families and seniors could derive strength.

"I know it will help people and the community," he said.

[Top of Page](#)

Star News / Weekender

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[Home Page](#)