

Building issues continue to crop up for 'Gansett officials

Without much having yet been decided regarding the ongoing push to build a new elementary school, Templeton town officials have already begun to look into taking dibs on space at the recently closed East Templeton Elementary, which was shuttered in June.

It was just a couple of weeks ago when this space suggested that if the district were left with no other choice but to follow through on the suggestion of William Clabaugh, the the Narragansett Regional School District's buildings and grounds director, that the new elementary school be built on the grounds where the current Templeton Center School is located, East Templeton would be a logical landing spot for students from Templeton Center, while construction is ongoing at the TCS site to build a new school.

Awaiting that final decision regarding where the new elementary school will be sited, though, it would make sense at first glance for town officials to wait for a short period before moving ahead with plans to utilize the recently closed school for municipal purposes.

Board of Selectmen Chairman Julie Farrell, though, pointed out that the building is no longer in the control of the schools, after the district had to follow through on deep budget cuts following a failed effort on a \$900,000

Proposition 2 1/2 override request last year.

"I believe the school district surplused the building to where it now is a town building," said Farrell. "So now it's town property, and we need to look at all options (regarding what to do about town office space)."

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When asked about the prospect that school district officials, likely having not anticipated some of the recent curveballs in the ongoing search to designate a home for a new elementary school, could consider Clabaugh's suggestion as a viable option, Farrell said, "We have not been approached about that being a possibility. There has been no discussion on that topic as far as I know."

Superintendent Dr. Roseli Weiss, though, wasn't about to completely discount that option, based on the fluid situation that still exists with finding a spot for a new elementary school.

"It's much too early to answer

that, as we are not at a place to come to that determination, but I'd have to keep that option open, even though we are working on some other options now," she said. "I think that as time goes on, we can talk about that during our next few building committee meetings. Whether we will go out for a fourth RFP or not, nothing is yet established, and we will take things as they come."

Making the issue of finding a location for municipal office space so pressing is that the current year's budget allocated only a limited amount for rent at the current location.

"The budget for 2012 has budgeted for the current offices at 690 Patriots Road until the end of March," noted Farrell. When asked why there are only three months of rent funded for town offices within the next fiscal year's budget, she added, "I believe that was the plan (to move to the new location and) we won't be at 252 Baldwinville Road by then," as delays and extra costs with renovations at that site have left town officials to consider other temporary options.

Even if Templeton Center does become the site for the new elementary school, and those students need to be sent to another school temporarily, Farrell explained the importance of finding town office space in the next few months, stating, "I believe it is my responsibility as a select-

man to look at all our options. We don't have to pay rent on it, and (Building Commissioner) Larry Brandt took us on a walk-through, and said is it feasible to use the first floor as temporary office space."

For the district, though, that is just one of two building issues that it had to deal with this past week, as a plan to install a new boiler at the Phillipston Memorial School hit the proverbial skids after the Board of Selectmen in that town reversed a decision to have Worcester Country Refrigeration do the work, cancelling the entire project.

During President Barack Obama's recent jobs speech, he spoke of the need to refurbish our schools, emphasizing, "How can we expect our kids to do their best in places that are literally falling apart?"

In that realm is the state's Green Repair Program, encouraging schools to install, among other things, more efficient boilers to replace aging ones. The one at Phillipston Memorial has been churning for approximately 66 years.

Under the program, the Massachusetts School Building Authority was set to fund 60 percent of the project, to replace the boiler.

Insert massive asterisk here.

For that project, a budget of \$143,234 was assigned to cover the cost of its installation. The district, though, was left with

few choices upon receiving the bids, as only two were received.

The "low" bid from Worcester County Refrigeration immediately crested over the limit set within the allocated budget, with a figure of \$177,000. At first, there was some discussion about having the town dip into reserve funds to make up the difference of more than \$33,000. Only to learn that the bid just included construction costs, meaning the total cost of the project was \$91,560 above what had been budgeted.

Upon seeing numbers so far off what had been budgeted, one can only guess that for some companies choosing to bid on the project, when seeing the word "Green," in association with this program, visions of "green" piles of cash come into view. The other bid came in at a cool \$195,000 just for the construction, so it would have left the town to find more than \$100,000 in additional funds to cover that bid cost.

Assistant Superintendent Ruth Miller probably said it best — "A boiler project in a small school should not cost \$234,00."

Making any prospect of moving forward on the project unlikely was that for the dollars above what was budgeted, the town was left with that bill, as the state building authority has it written in their bylaws that contributions by the authority end at the amount that was

agreed to previously.

Not a dollar more.

When taking into account the 40 percent that Phillipston was set to pay on the project, on top of having to pay the \$91,560 in what was above what was budgeted, the town faced having to pay about 64 percent of the total cost, or nearly \$149,000.

Despite the decision to stop the project, Dr. Weiss voiced a hope that a solution can be found to let the project move forward.

"We're going to do some things on the local side, and Phillipston will have someone local people take a look at the project as well," she said. "I will make some calls to see what can happen, and one of those things will hopefully result in an action plan, and we will try to get the job done."

When receiving the bids, Dr. Weiss admitted to being surprised by how high they ended up being.

"We go with our owner's project manager to see what we should ask each town, or in this case, Phillipston (for funding). No one expected that it would come in so high, that was totally surprising. We need to get it done, though, and we will keep working on it until we can get it done."

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