

'Frustrating to all of us'

By Melissa Russell, Correspondent

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Dissatisfied with the continued poor performance of a subcontractor on the Reading Memorial High School construction project, the School Committee voted Monday night to assume control and send the work back out to bid.

Although the building was occupied last December, many items had been left incomplete, most of which were remedied over February vacation. The HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) work has not been completed to the satisfaction of the School Committee, despite repeated complaints and notification.

Scott Dunlap, representative of Ai3, the project manager, told the committee that the general contractor and subcontractor had been notified that the school department would be taking over the work, and that the cost of finishing the job, about \$300,000, would be subtracted from their fee.

"This is frustrating to all of us," Dunlap said.

At this time the project engineers are preparing a bid package that outlines the scope of work that still needs to be done. Dunlap said it would be approximately 60 to 90 days before a new HVAC subcontractor would be on site, with completion of work taking another two to three months.

"Nothing is easy or quick, but it is a guaranteed means to an end: a qualified and reputable subcontractor to do the work," he said.

Additionally, the school department is taking over responsibility for repairs to the track surface from the general contractor, after continued drainage problems. As with the HVAC work, a bid package, including complete surface removal, modifications to the base and the installation of a new surface, is being drawn up, and the cost of the work, estimated at \$230,000, will be borne by the general contractor.

Dunlap said that although additional maintenance might be needed during rainy days, runners should face no danger when using the track.

"It is just not the track you bought and paid for," he said.

Dunlap also told the committee that Ai3 has rejected as "unreasonable," the general contractor's claim of \$900,000 for asbestos removal during the demolition portion of the project's final phase.

"We felt it should be reinvestigated," Dunlap said.

In other business, the Committee voted to use a portion of the athletics' department revolving account to pay for a geotechnical survey needed for field light installation.

School Superintendent Patrick Schettini said it is "absolutely appropriate" to use the funds, which come from user fees and ticket sales for athletic events, for lighting the athletic fields. The majority of funds, upwards of \$30,000 to \$50,000, will come from private donations, he added.

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