

School field delayed by town project

9/16/04 ADVOCATE

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Construction work on the Reading Memorial High School practice field is three months behind schedule, and may incur increased costs and scheduling problems, the School Committee learned Monday night.

Project Manager Scott Dunlap reported that delays on a town water line project have held up the construction of the artificial turf field. The water line was to have been completed before construction began at the high school last summer, but the work has been delayed twice, and has yet to start, Dunlap said.

The town has given the go-ahead for construction to begin on Oct. 1, approximately three months after the anticipated start date, Dunlap said.

The field is due to be completed on Dec. 1, or before the ground freezes, Dunlap said. Any delays beyond the Oct. 1 start date may mean that the work will have to be postponed until spring, he said. If work on the practice field were delayed, it "would obviously have a domino effect," delaying other elements of the project due to begin in the spring, Dunlap stated.

Additionally, TLT Construction, the general contractors, had planned on using fill material taken out of the practice field for use under the building footprint. Because work was delayed on the practice field, TLT purchased fill material

and had it delivered to the site to avoid delaying work on the building. When the fill material is finally removed from the practice field, Dunlap said it would need to be stored or trucked away.

The practice field, originally budgeted for \$15,000 to \$20,000, will now undoubtedly cost more, although the amount has yet to be negotiated with TLT, Dunlap said.

He stated that the town has indicated it will absorb the additional cost, and that it will not impact the high school renovation budget.

Vice-Chairman Harvey "Pete" Dahl stated, "This is a serious issue. The project is already tight on budget, and we can't think for a minute that we can spend money frivolously. Even if the

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water department picks it up, it comes from water rates. We need to be on top of it and get the damn thing done."

The committee also voiced concern over complaints about temperature fluctuations and stagnant air on the second floor at the new Wood End Elementary School.

Committee Chairman Carl McFadden told a representative from the school's architecture firm, Flansburgh Associates, "We're frustrated. It's a beautiful school, and then when people get in there the complaints are justified."

Sam Bird, senior associate in charge of construction for Flansburgh, said because the building is not air-conditioned, there is no way to make the temperature cooler than it is outside. Body heat, computers, and electronics raise the indoor temperature as well, he explained.

"We're not sure of the source of the problem," he said. "It could be because of the nearing of the equinox and the sun is very low, coming under the shades."

McFadden replied, "We have school every September, what do we do?"

Bird stated that airflow tests and air balancing reports, expected this week, would help them diagnose the problem and remedy the situation.

Superintendent Patrick Schettini told the board, "We are working to address concerns but we can't get everything done at the speed of light. We are doing our best on every single issue brought to our attention."

In other business

The committee also responded to a parent letter expressing concern over placement of disabled children in mainstream classrooms.

Schettini clarified the school's position and the state law that requires special education students to be in traditional classrooms as much as their Individualized Education Plans (IEP) allow.

"We would never purposely put a youngster in a classroom who would harm others or disrupt the learning process," he told the board. Mainstreaming "is the law, and it is ethically and morally correct, and I feel in my heart is the best for all the children," he said.

Committee member Lisa Gibbs, herself a parent of a disabled youngster, stated that while parental concerns are valid, "to automatically assume a child with disabilities is dangerous is slanderous to all children with special needs."

"It is not the 1950s here," she said. "These children have civil rights, they have a right to be educated. People need to get the facts before they write a let-

ter like that. I am highly insulted by this letter."

Lastly, the district's school principals introduced 48 new teachers to the committee, 13 from the high school alone. The new teachers come with a wide range of experiences, some fresh out of bachelor's or master's programs, some from business or science backgrounds. Three are RMHS graduates; and several live in the community.

In welcoming the new hires, committee member Robert Spadafora told of his aunt and uncle, both educators, who perished on 9/11 aboard Flight 11. He said of his uncle, "he never gave up on any student, and I ask you tonight to seize the opportunity. You have incredible power to make a difference. You will never know where your influence stops."

"Teaching is a gift," he said. "Welcome to the Reading Public Schools."