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Auburn schools hire planning consultant

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AUBURN — The School Committee voted Wednesday to spend \$25,000 to hire a consultant to help the School Department plan for future building and learning needs.

With Connie Mercier the only member opposing, the committee voted 6–1 to hire McCormick Facilities Management of Dexter.

Mike McCormick will begin work in Auburn in September, Superintendent Katy Grondin said. A citizen planning committee will be assembled to work with him.

A similar facilities planning effort was done in 2008 with in-house staff, which recommended closing East Auburn Community School. That idea was killed after citizens showed up in force to protest. Since 2008, School Department staffing has been cut, and this master plan is expected to be more thorough.

With his engineering knowledge, McCormick can provide a better analysis and recommendations that can be done in house, Grondin said.

He'll look at each building, the available square footage, and look at what could go in each facility, and what would it look like, she said.

“He'll look at how much is the upkeep of certain buildings. Would it make more sense to put more money here because that building cost this much, or does it make more sense to put it here?” Grondin asked. “He talks about long-range cost of buildings and maintenance.”

McCormick, whose firm has experience with K–12 school upgrades,

consolidations and enrollment projections, will be charged with looking at each school building and making several different long-range recommendations.

“The broader issue is 21st century education, creating or revamping facilities for what's going to take place in the schools,” School Committee Chairman David Das said.

Before he makes any recommendations, McCormick will hold two public hearings to hear from residents. In the planning, improving or replacing the high school will be a priority, Grondin said.

“We didn't get state funding, and we need to invest in Edward Little High School.” One major problem at the high school is air quality. “We know that,” Grondin said.

McCormick will provide a cost analysis for the high school, asking questions such as should it be done in stages; should it be a grade 7–12 school.

“He listens to groups, then he'll say, 'Here are three scenarios. Which one do you think is a priority,’” Grondin said.

On projected student enrollment, McCormick's record is that he's been accurate, whereas past Auburn enrollment projections have not been, resulting in a new Park Street Elementary School that is already full.

Before voting Wednesday night, City Councilor David Young, the mayor's representative on the School Committee, said \$25,000 may sound like a lot of money, “but planning is very important.”

Committee member Francois Bussiere said hiring McCormick could save money. “He may discover savings we never thought of.”

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