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LCSC hires firm to help with planning

BY SARAH LANG
The Lebanon Reporter

LEBANON — The Lebanon Community School Corporation board voted Tuesday to approve a contract with Schmidt Associates to determine if school facilities should be remodeled, added on to, or even left as is.

Under the contract, the architecture firm will work with the school corporation for the next 12 to 13 months to assess the buildings and assist with conceptual design and gathering community input for potential future building remodel projects. The board approved the arrangement, which will cost \$42,000.

"I think it's imperative that we let the community know that this is their house. It's not just ours," said Alan Cragun, board president. "We have a responsibility to take care of our house. We just need to keep up with this process."

Bob Ross, LCSC executive director of resources and operations, clarified that this contract does not mean any decision has been made about hiring architects for any actual building project. They will just be working with Schmidt Associates until the referendum, and if that passes, additional decisions will be made at that time.

"This is not the purchase of a final project," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor. "This is a contract and a relationship we'll use to assist us in moving forward to address all issues that will surface in the next months."

The referendum is a new process for the corporation. Since the state took over school budgets, it mandates that any school building project be approved by a community vote.

"We're on a little bit of a learning curve here, out there right with the community," said Michele Thomas, board vice president. "Hopefully we'll work together to do what we need to do to maintain our buildings. We just ask for a little bit of patience, and we'll go from there."

With the help of Schmidt Associates, Taylor said, the corporation will prepare thoroughly to address how to move forward, decide to what degree to move forward, and answer any financial questions. But, he warned, Lebanon High School is more than 50 years old.

"We're going to encounter a number of concerns about the mechanics of the building and about learning environment," Taylor said.

Schmidt Associates made a presentation to the LCSC school board last January after they toured and assessed each of the six schools plus the administration, transportation and maintenance buildings. To fix all the problems, they predicted a price tag ranging from \$275 million to \$44 million. This estimated cost wasn't what they suggested the corporation do, explained Schmidt architect Anne Marie Burrell at the January meeting, but they just wanted to raise awareness of the issues.

Schmidt presented that Lebanon High School has a sustainability rating of 59 percent, meaning 41 percent of the building is in need of repair. Lebanon Middle School had a sustainability rating of 84 percent; Central Elementary, 68 percent; Harney Elementary, 77 percent; Perry-Worth Elementary, 81 percent; Hattie B. Stokes Elementary, 96 percent; Facility Service Center, 58 percent; Transportation Facility, 61 percent; and the Administration Building, 87 percent.

"I see this as being one, if not the top, priority over the next five years," Taylor said at the January meeting. "There is a sense of urgency to address, but we can't overreact."

LCSC

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Schmidt Associates is also the firm working on the Western Boone School Corporation's remodel project.

"We've defined a firm that will provide us valuable assistance," Taylor said.

Also at the board meeting Tuesday, the board voted to accept a change in health insurance providers to Humana Health Insurance provided by MJ Insurance in Indianapolis, hoping to save almost 11 percent in insurance premiums.

LHS agricultural science teacher and Indiana 2010 Teacher of the Year Byron Ernest was also presented with an award at the meeting.

"I want you to know how special this is, and I've said this before, but this could not have happened in my life anywhere but in Lebanon," Ernest said. "That means everything had to fall into place. The Jackie McNutts, the Kevin O'Rourke, the Charles Taits all had to be in the right places."

Ernest continued to say he figures President Barack Obama owes Indiana, so he

would want the national teacher of the year to come from the state. But, Taylor joked, Obama hasn't returned his calls.

Ernest's portfolio for the national competition is due Nov. 5. The final four will be announced in March, and the winner in April.