

Ellwood City Ledger

Officials blame Shell plant for North Side school work cost being double expected

By Patrick O'Shea

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ELLWOOD CITY — The Ellwood City Area School District will have to pay nearly twice what it had expected for some renovation work at North Side Primary School.

And officials are laying the blame on a project in Beaver County that is supposed to bring regional economic development.

Robert Englebaugh, executive vice president of HHSDR Architects of Pittsburgh, whose firm was contracted by the district to create specifications for the project, told the school board that only one company, Thomas Contracting of Grove City, submitted a bid on the work.

Thomas Contracting's bid of \$451,500 was more than \$210,000 higher than the \$240,000 the district had budgeted. However, board members said they feel they have no choice but to proceed because they do not believe a rebid will result in better results. They will take an official vote at Thursday's board meeting.

This is the second time Ellwood City Area has attempted to bid out the work. In May, no bids were received. A third attempt could not occur until next spring.

Englebaugh warned the board that he does not expect the situation to improve any time soon, and suggested later bid amounts likely would just get higher.

"We are backed into a corner," Board President Michael Neupauer said.

Englebaugh said, as engineers said in May, that it is the ongoing construction of the Shell Chemicals ethane cracker plant in Potter Township that is causing the situation by draining the regional workforce. He said that strain on the number

of available workers will continue for at least a few more years. The plant, which is set to go online in 2020, will convert natural gas byproducts into plastics and is expected to draw a lot of associated facilities to the region.

“It is frustrating for other districts, as well,” Englebaugh said about labor costs increasing.

Once the bid is awarded, district business manager Richard Zarone said work should start quickly because they want to get the project completed before snow starts falling.

The project will include the installation of new downspouts, drainage piping, gutters and skylights on the Orchard Avenue building. Contractors also will install ice guards and gutter melting systems to eliminate snow buildups on the roof that have led to damage to the system and water leaks inside the building in recent years.