

EMS plagued with delays

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EVANSTON — A disappointed school board received the news of more delays in the Evanston Middle School construction project at a board meeting for Uinta County School District No. 1 on Wednesday.

Evanston Middle School is a hot topic for UCSD officials and community members alike. Discussion about the project — plagued with delays, poor workmanship and questionable oversight — continues to dominate recent meetings.

Superintendent Ryan Thomas, Brent Sanders of Cook Sanders Associates and Pat Rooney of the district's facilities and maintenance department updated the board on the construction project.

Thomas said approximately three weeks ago they discovered poor workmanship, construction workers cutting corners and several milestones not met, which has led to the latest delays. Due to these issues, a new completion date is slated for Sept. 28.

"Have you actually caught them cutting corners, or are you afraid there have been corners cut you don't know about?" school board chair Kim Bateman asked at the meeting.

"Yes," Thomas said. "The roof leaks and [it] is in poor condition. Even though it is brand new, it looks like a 50-year-old roof. We've discovered flashing issues and design flaws."

Thomas said scheduling has been an issue and that it hasn't been done well. They found completed work damaged due to an overlap in trades on site.

"Here's an example," Thomas said. "A room will get painted and then the wire guys come in and ruin the walls."

He said he believes this is only going to increase and cause more issues as trades rush to complete project goals.

Bateman asked Sanders, who has spent a considerable amount of time on site and is working as a liaison for the district, if he thought the project would be completed by the new September date.

"It would be midnight of that night if they get it done," Sanders said. "Quality is an issue. If we push them I think it will make things worse."

Rooney said they have stopped workers from doing things wrong and made them fix things that weren't done correctly the first time.

"We shouldn't be paying for things twice, but we don't want crap work," Thomas said.

Board members asked if the current architect and construction company could be fired, since they haven't complied with the contract.

Thomas said they have spoken with the state regarding the issue. Any type of suit filed against the construction companies or architect must be done by the state. Sanders said if they did fire the current company, there would be warranty issues with the work already completed.

"If you fire them, there is no warranty on the work, and most likely a new contractor won't warranty work already done," he said.

Thomas said hiring a new contractor would push the completion date back another year at least. Ascent Construction, out of Centerville, Utah, is handling the project.

Delays mean more money as well. Thomas said this new delay could cost \$18,500 per month, and they are looking at at least two months longer than originally anticipated.

"We are negotiating with the construction company, but if they don't budge it could be a deal breaker," he said. "We have nearly depleted our contingency funds."

With the new completion date of Sept. 28, students will start the school year using the old facilities, and continue to turn to Davis Middle School and the rec center for help. If the new deadline is met, they expect to move into the new construction around autumn break. If the new deadline isn't met, it pushes move-in to Thanksgiving break or possibly Christmas break.

In other business, the board moved on to discuss the 2015-2016 budget. In an open hearing, Director of Special Services John Williams, presented the 2014-15 budget and necessary changes for the new budget year. Williams said the district would begin the new budget year with approximately \$5 million in reserves for the general fund, and the anticipated appropriation for 2015-16 budget is \$64,698,919.

He said most of the funds were within budgetary means; however, the food services fund would have a \$323,000 shortfall, which would need to be monitored. After hearing the report and making adjustments, the budget was approved.