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## Orange Selectboard endorses repair of Dexter Park floor



Dexter Park Innovation School in Orange. Staff FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

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ORANGE — Looking to fix Dexter Park Innovation School’s floor, the Selectboard authorized its town administrator to apply for emergency financing and endorsed an Annual Town Meeting warrant item to support repairs.

Ultimately, the plan is to construct a three-story addition onto the adjacent Fisher Hill Elementary School and demolish Dexter Park, moving all students into the expanded and renovated building. Repairing the floor would remedy the problem for the remaining three to five years it is expected to be used.

Martin Goulet of Hill International Inc., the company managing the project on behalf of the town, explained the school’s problems during a meeting held via the video conferencing platform Zoom last week. He said dampness in a crawlspace has caused pieces of the concrete floor to deteriorate and even pop off, and part of a reinforcement bar is exposed. He said the fix is relatively easy and entails putting posts under the center of all of the floor joists.

“We don’t have to do a tremendous amount of construction to return the strength to the floor,” he said. “But we do have to get down in that crawlspace to do the work. The complication there is that the crawlspace is contaminated with asbestos.”

Goulet explained Hill International is working with McKenzie Engineering and hazardous material consulting firm ATC Group Services to plan “our approach to the crawlspace.” He said removing the contamination would cost about \$250,000.

But, he added, asbestos remediation can be handled when the building is ultimately demolished.

“We’re just going to get trained asbestos workers into the crawlspace to shore up the floor. This repair will be certified by McKenzie to last for five years,” he explained. “So that gets us out of the woods, out of the trouble, for the period of time it will take to build the new ... Fisher Hill School and take down Dexter.”

The Orange School Building Committee has agreed to spend \$50,000 in uncommitted money from a feasibility study to fund the repair’s design. Voters at Annual Town Meeting, planned for June 15 at 6 p.m. on the Ralph C. Mahar Regional School football field, will be asked whether they support funding the repairs.

Town Administrator Gabriele Voelker said repairing the school floor is more cost-effective than educating students elsewhere, which could cost up to \$1 million.

“It makes sense for us to repair Dexter Park school for the three to five years that we’re going to need it,” she noted.

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