

Braintree committee favors a new South Middle School

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The school committee has voted to recommend to state officials building a new South Middle School.

BRAINTREE – The town could be looking at building its first new school in a half-century.

The school committee Monday night unanimously voted send to state school building officials a recommendation to build a new South Middle School behind the present building. School officials had been looking at building an addition onto the school as part of a plan to move Grade 5 classes to the middle school and free up classrooms in the elementary schools.

School committee member Thomas Devin, who chairs the school building committee, said building a new school would be faster and cheaper than renovating and expanding the present structure.

“It’s less interruption. Quicker,” Devin said.

Cost estimates prepared by the project’s architects, Miller Dyer Spears, showed renovating and expanding the present school building would cost between \$94.5 and \$96.1 million and take two years to complete. A new building would cost between \$87.6 and \$90.5 million and the construction time would be 18 months.

Mayor Joseph Sullivan said he believes the cost estimates represent a “high watermark,” and would come down in the bidding process. Sullivan said he is confident the town is one the right path. He also noted that the costs for the two middle school projects are similar, with the expansion and renovation of East Middle School budgeted at \$84 million.

Devin said that when the work at East is completed next year, it will be essentially a new school.

Michael Carroll of Hill International, who is overseeing both middle school projects for the town, said that the design of South makes it more difficult to build the addition and to move students around while the work is underway.

“We don’t have as much flexibility as East,” Carroll said.

An addition at South would be “actually impacting the whole south side of the building,” he said.

And minimizing construction impacts on students by doing the work after school hours and at other times would drive up the cost, he said.

The East project is approximately two-thirds renovation and one-third new construction, Carroll said. At South, the project would be 45 percent renovation and 55 percent new construction.

The school building committee had endorsed the new building plan.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority will review the information submitted by the town. If the authority gives its approval to the project, it is expected to cover about half of the cost of the new school.

Sullivan said the town would have to make a decision on what to do with the present South Middle School building.

The last new school building constructed in the town was Braintree High School, which opened in 1972.