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## Orange's Fisher Hill Elementary School design phase reaches 60% milestone



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ORANGE — The Fisher Hill Elementary School project's design phase has reached 60 percent completion, and the town expects to award a construction contract at the end of June.

Bruce Scherer, chair of the Orange School Building Committee, explained this phase by Raymond Design Associates helps determine the project's finer details, such as the types of windows and doors that will be used. He compared it to someone being interested in building a house and needing to figure out the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, or deciding which direction the structure will face.

"You don't know on day one what size ventilation ducts you need. But you would know that by the time you got to 60 percent," he said, adding that the design is expected to be 90 percent completed by April or May. "So it's done in increments, because it's a matter of constantly refining what the product is."

A three-story, roughly 50,000-square-foot addition will be built onto Fisher Hill Elementary School, while Dexter Park Innovation School will be demolished, so all students will move into the expanded and renovated building.

Martin Goulet of Hill International Inc., the company managing the project on behalf of the town, said the project is expected to be completed in 2½ years. He said the plan is for Orange to take possession of the building in time for students to start their academic year there in September 2023.

"At 60 percent, the building's shape and the rooms are (designed)," he explained, adding that Hill International is reviewing 300 pages of concept drawings so a list of potential improvements can be offered. "The building and the site of the building, plumbing, walls — everything has a detail attached."

Goulet said the company is “diving deep into the details” to ensure the drawings are as complete as possible.

“The big picture is done,” he said. “It’s the details now.”

Images of what the school is expected to look like can be seen on the Fisher Hill School Construction Facebook page. According to a Jan. 25 post, a large glass area facing the parking lot will allow natural light into the media center/makerspace rooms.

Scherer said the drawings are also being reviewed by the Massachusetts School Building Authority and by the commissioning agent, which puts them through an exhaustive process. The building authority, a quasi-independent government agency that Scherer said will cover 80 percent of the project’s eligible costs and gets its money through sales tax, sets certain time frames for the percentage of completion of the design and engineering work.

“This phase of the work allows the next contractor to go in and start building the building,” Scherer said of the design. “We’re all terrifically excited about it. We’re just looking for this to continue to unfold. We are now in the midst of building our new school.”

Dexter Park Innovation School was built in 1951 and the school building authority designated it as a “Category 4” school, its lowest rating, in 2006. This showed a need for significant repairs or replacement. Voters approved funding a feasibility study in 2018 to study the Dexter Park problem and yield options for repair or replacement. The new Fisher Hill facility is meant to serve the educational needs of all of Orange’s elementary-age children for at least 50 years.

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