

NEWS

'Aggressive' schedule will keep Braintree South Middle School construction on track

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BRAINTREE – Officials hope to speed up the pace of construction of the new South Middle School so the building is ready for the first day of the 2023-24 school year.

The start of the project was pushed back by nearly two months after two trade groups and four contractors won an injunction to remove a project labor agreement from the contract. This required the town to rebid the contract, with a new bid deadline of Dec. 7.

At a meeting of the town's school building committee in Monday, Chair Nicole Taub said a revised schedule had been worked out in consultation with the mayor's office, school architect Miller Dyer Spears and **Hill International**, which is overseeing the project for the town.

Taub, who is chief of staff to Mayor Charles Kokoros, said the new timetable is "an aggressive schedule which allows us to keep on track for opening in fall of 2023."

Mary Mahoney, of Hill International, said the schedule calls for construction to start in late December and the new building to be completed by late June or early July 2023. Some paving work will continue through that summer, she said.

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"We're hoping we have a warm winter and can move quickly," Mahoney said.

Construction of the new school, the town's first all-new school in a half-century, was to begin next month before the challenge to the project labor agreement, which was agreed to by the school building committee.

Under a project labor agreement, a labor union or group of unions will agree not to engage in any work stoppages on a given project where union labor and union subcontractors are used.

The groups who challenged the requirement said it would effectively prevent them from bidding on the \$73.3 million project.

Norfolk Superior Court Judge Paul Wilson issued the order on Sept. 10, saying the project is not large enough, of sufficient duration or complexity to overcome the anti-competitive effects of the agreement.

The construction of the new South Middle School is part of a plan to move Grade 5 students to the middle schools, freeing up classroom space in the elementary schools. This is the second year of Grade 5 classes at the East Middle School, which has been renovated and expanded, while the Highlands and Liberty elementary schools still house Grade 5 classes.