

**The Neighborhood Schools Committee unanimously recommends that the Pottstown School Board contract with Landmark Design Associates of Pittsburgh as per their letter to Tom Hylton dated Dec. 14, 2009, to tour our five elementary schools with Barry Angstadt and provide a written summary of the condition of each building, at a total cost not to exceed \$3,000, to be completed before our next board meeting on Jan. 7. I make that motion on behalf of the committee.**

Rationale for motion

The Pottstown School Board has been discussing making renovations to its elementary schools for more than ten years. The schools were first evaluated by Hayes Large Architects in 1997. Then they were evaluated by Gilbert Associates Architects in May 2001.

In 2003, the district hired Crabtree Rohrbaugh Architects, which never made a written evaluation of our schools but relied on the Gilbert study for the buildings' physical condition. Crabtree's work consisted of suggestions for renovating or replacing elementary school buildings.

All these architects had a financial stake in the outcome. The more the district would spend, the more money the architects would make.

We need an evaluation of our elementary schools from a disinterested architect – one who will evaluate our buildings for a set fee and not do any work or earn any fees beyond that, no matter what we do.

The Neighborhood Schools committee asks the board to accept our recommendation of Landmark Design Associates to do a one-time evaluation of the condition of our five elementary schools for \$2,000 plus travel, with the total cost not to exceed \$3,000. This is not a feasibility study – just an evaluation of the buildings. The scope of work is set forth in the attached letter.

Based in Pittsburgh, Landmark Design Associates has renovated scores of older buildings, including classroom buildings for the Pittsburgh School District, the Brentwood School District, the Crawford Central School District in Meadville, the University of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University.

Ellis Schmidlapp, principal of the firm, served as chairman of an architects' task force that indirectly made it possible for us to renovate the Pottstown Middle School. In 1990, the Pennsylvania Department of Education promulgated a new rule for school construction reimbursement called the 60 percent rule. If the cost of renovating a building was more than 60 percent of the cost of new construction, the state would not reimburse the project. The theory was an older structure was not worth the investment.

Schmidlapp and other architects demonstrated that a renovated building could have the same life span as a new one, and the 60 percent rule was rescinded by the secretary of education in 1998. Pottstown applied to the state to renovate the middle school in 1999 and the project qualified for state reimbursement.

Seven of the nine members of the Pottstown School Board have publicly pledged to preserve and make necessary renovations to our five neighborhood elementary schools.

We need to get started now if we want to start working on our schools next summer – the summer of 2010. We must do this because energy costs will begin to skyrocket in January 2011, when the rate caps will be lifted for PECO Energy. Also, we currently have 23 modular classrooms which are huge energy hogs, and we need to start removing them as soon as possible.