

Union labor agreement voted down in Rockland

Would have been in effect for \$86M school project

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ROCKLAND —

Union members left Rockland Town Hall on Thursday night without a project labor agreement for construction of a new middle school and renovation of the high school.

The school building committee voted 12-1 against entering the agreement, which would have forced any non-union contractor working on the \$86 million project to hire from union halls. It also would have established wage and benefit requirements.

“A lot of unemployed people from the town voted for the (Proposition 2½) override (to fund the school building project) last year thinking they would get a job,” said Bobby MacDonald, a Rockland resident and union member.

Union representatives said the agreement would have given preference to local union members.

“Now, there is no guarantee,” said Peter Gibbons, business manager for Sprinkler Fitters and Apprentices Local 550.

Ronald N. Cogliano, president of Merit Construction Alliance, told the building committee last week that about 80 percent of all construction workers are non-union.

Gibbons said, “That number may be true nationwide, but in Massachusetts the division between union and non-union is about 50-50.”

The school building committee had a wealth of information for weighing the pros and cons, Chairman John Rogers said.

“A lot of Rockland people pay taxes and are not in the union; they deserve a crack at a cut of (the project),” said Rogers, who described himself as “not anti-PLA.”

Rogers said he voted in favor of a project labor agreement for redevelopment of the South Weymouth Naval Air Station several years ago, when he was serving on the board overseeing the redevelopment. He believes the school-project circumstances are different.

He said he was concerned about whether the committee would be able to successfully defend itself if it approved a project labor agreement and that approval was challenged in court.

A previous court decision suggests that the court would analyze the complexity, duration and size of the project.

“The cost of legal fees to defend a court challenge was also a consideration for committee members,” Rogers said.

“Union people can still bid on the project,” he said.

Had the committee voted differently, the hiring of a non-union contractor would have been “very unlikely,” because non-union contractors “would have to follow the project labor agreement,” Rogers said.

Gibbons said union contractors will probably still bid on the project.

“(The decision) decreases the possibility of getting a bid immensely, but we’re not giving up,” he said.