



File photo

Students and parents pack Coventry High School's auditorium in August 2012 for the school's "Freshman First Night." A task force has been entrusted with reviewing the town's enrollment capacity.

Space issues in Coventry?

Enrollment task force brings on consultants

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COVENTRY — Now that the district has a building use consultant and an architect on board, members of Coventry's enrollment task force committee will get much-needed recommendations for best use of the school district's space and where improvements will be necessary.

"I think it was a very good first meeting," said Dave Florio, chairman of the enrollment task force committee as well as member of the school committee. "I think it's a great collaboration and they will be very thorough and truly assess our needs."

Florio, along with enrollment task force committee member Mike Almeida, who is also the Coventry School District Superintendent, met with David DeQuattro, an architect from Robinson, Green, Beretta, located in Providence and John Kennedy, from the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), Wednesday morning to get the ball rolling on the analysis of best use space in an effort to address overcrowding for all the schools in town.

As a former school administrator and teacher himself, Kennedy not only brings analysis expertise but a more in-debt knowledge of what may or may not be needed.

"We work as a team and start with contacting the principals to let them know we're coming in then and give them a template we use with questions and describe what type of information we're looking for. We do a capacity analysis and try to help a district deal with their facing needs," he said. "We realize every district is unique and we pay close attention to the needs of each but we also see the commonalities of each."

His company, in conjunction with the architects, also conducts site visits while the school

Space recommendations will be made

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day is in session, if possible, so they can get the truest sense of day-to-day operations.

"We present options, we don't make recommendations because it's your community," Kennedy said.

DeQuattro has been with RGB since 1998. The firm's many clients include municipalities and schools.

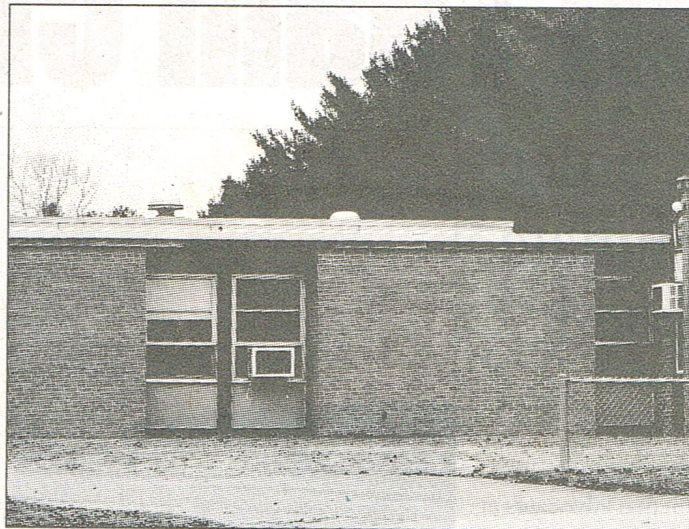
"Part of our job scope is to analyze buildings and bring them back up to code," he said. The idea to have this task force goes back to when Florio was elected to fill the seat of Nancy Sprenglemeyer, who passed away after a short illness.

His idea, from the start, was to pull some thing like this together and get information once and for all after there was so much talk over the last two years of what to do about the issue of schools becoming overcrowded and one completely out of the mix because it's closed.

His district includes Tiogue, Hopkins Hill and Blackrock Elementary Schools.

"It's important to look into having kindergarten and more room in the schools so we're not flat-footed should the state pass a mandate," Florio said.

He pointed out how Hopkins Hill, Tiogue and Washington Oak Elementary Schools all



File photo

The Coventry Town Hall Annex on Flat River Road once served as a middle school and has been mentioned as a possible location for a new school.

have a population of special needs children but Washington Oak's is the highest.

"The wheelchairs are out in the hallways, which is a fire hazard," Florio said.

In some Powerpoint presentation pictures, Almeida showed the representatives some examples of where students and teachers are just almost literally pushed together with no privacy for one-on-one learning or having a parent-teacher conference.

According to the request for proposal (RFP), the job of the consultant is to assess current

enrollment and space capacity at all five currently operating elementary schools based on lack of space and the cost of what possible solutions may be.

Another portion of the RFP was to assess future enrollment projections for the next three years taking into consideration new housing developments.

"We know in our current schools, it's tight so whatever changes we make, need to include the possibility to open an all-day kindergarten," Almeida said. "I know the town is not interested in redistricting more

than once and even once is going to be a tough sell."

Oak Haven Elementary was closed in 2010 and according to Almeida, was due to a \$1.1 million shortfall with no support from the town to keep it open.

The current building where the central offices are located, which was once Flat River Middle School, was closed by only a difference of three votes, according to the school superintendent.

Coventry has the largest high school, middle school and elementary school (Washington Oak) in the state.

DeQuattro suggested the group do two analyses: one anticipating all-day kindergarten and the other without.

"All-day kindergartens are the trend but they are not mandated and you can find research both for and against having all-day Ks," Almeida said.

The analysis is expected to begin within the next two weeks, starting with the on-site visits and is expected to take about six weeks to complete.

The representatives will have regular communication with the task force and will bring their final findings to the task force, then members of the school followed by town council.