

Details will decide air, soil test funding

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Elmira, Southport and Chemung County government officials say they do not yet have enough information to decide whether they will help Elmira schools pay for new tests at Southside High School.

Representatives from the three governments said they have not yet been approached by the Elmira school district to help pay for an independent contractor to perform additional air, soil and water tests at the 777 S. Main St. school.

At an Aug. 29 school board meeting, Elmira Schools Superintendent Laura E. Sherwood said the district would begin contacting local governments to ask for their help.

Sherwood said Tuesday that an advisory committee will ask the governments to help pay for new tests. The committee, which will advise the school board, will be made up of three doctors from Arnot Ogden

Medical Center and members of the community. It is still being formed, Sherwood said, and information on its progress will be released today.

Elmira school board members emphasized during the Aug. 29 meeting that they didn't doubt the conclusions of the tests done by the state departments of Health and Environmental Conservation, which found the school to be safe, but they felt obligated "to err on the side of caution."

Southside sits on property that was home to manufacturing facilities for more than 100 years. The state began investigating possible environmental hazards in April after parents raised concerns about cancer rates among current and former Southside students.

Part of Southside High sits in the city and part of it is in the town of Southport.

Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli said a number of questions would have to be answered before the county would help pay for a new round of tests at the school.

CONCERN on the SOUTHSIDE

The questions include: How much would the county be expected to contribute, and would it be better to have an independent contractor reanalyze the samples as opposed to conducting a new set of tests?

Santulli said he also wants to know whether state or federal grants are available to pay an independent contractor.

"First of all, I've had conversations with Laura Sherwood, but we have not been asked formally to do anything," Santulli said. "If they want us to be a part of it then we should be formally approached."

Robert Masia, Southport town supervisor, would not comment on whether his town would help pay for tests since he had not heard from school officials. Masia said the town's five-member board would have the ultimate decision.

Likewise, Elmira City Man-

ager Samuel Iraci Jr. said it would be up to the City Council to decide whether the city would help pay for an independent contractor.

"The city has already ... committed funds and done a lot of work," Iraci said. "That's why a second opinion is being sought — because the city has recommended that from the beginning."

Councilman James Hare, D-6th, a Southside representative, declined to comment, deferring to Mayor Stephen Hughes.

Hughes could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

The Elmira City Council authorized the city to pay up to \$15,000 to lawyer Craig Slater, an environmental specialist hired by the city to keep an eye on the state's cancer investigation.

Slater, who works for the law firm Harter, Secrest & Emery in Buffalo, was one of a dozen lawyers who worked on the Love Canal investigation more than 20 years ago.

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