

# Southside: Panel to guide testing at school

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"However, I think it does need to be a little more inclusive," Sherwood

said, referring to concerns of parents and students. "There are two extremes here and we want both

sides to be heard," Sherwood said. The state began investigating possible environmental hazards in April and reported Aug. 23 that the soil, air and water at the school pose no health risk to students. Some parents had raised concerns about the school because of a seemingly elevated rate of cancer among current and former students.

The school, at 777 S. Main St., opened in 1979 on land that was home to manufacturing facilities for more than a century. Although classes will begin as planned on Wednesday, no fall sports teams will play or practice on school property or at nearby McNaught Field until more soil tests are conducted.

Sherwood, Southport Supervisor Robert Masia, Elmira Mayor Stephen Hughes and Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli met Aug. 25 to discuss who should be on the committee and how it should function. "My suggestion is that there be no elected officials," Santulli said. "We need to take the politics out of this thing. It should be a combination of experts and people who are just concerned."

Arnot Ogden Medical Center in Elmira has offered the committee the services of three of its physicians, said one of those doctors, Dr. Patricia Meinhardt, executive medical director of the Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Arnot.

The other medical experts from Arnot include Dr. John Carroll, a pediatrician who is vice president of medical affairs at Arnot, and Dr. Rose Byland, a radiation oncologist at Arnot's Falck Cancer Center.

Another member of the committee will be Craig Slater, an environmental attorney from Buffalo who was hired by the city to oversee the state's investigation.

Slater said the committee must form quickly to review the data and write a formal comment on the state Department of Health's report.

Slater said he had spoken with a representative of U.S. Rep. Amo Houghton, R-Corning, to discuss obtaining a federal grant to pay for an independent technical analysis of the data.

Slater said he wants the committee to have an independent toxicologist or environmental expert — one not associated with a government agency or any group with a vested interest in the situation — review the data and make recommendations.

Santulli agrees that a thorough review of the technical information would help build the community's confidence in the results.

"At some point you have to bring this to a conclusion based on facts, not emotions," Santulli said.

Hughes said the public will be invited to attend all committee meetings and work sessions. The committee will meet as often as needed, Hughes said.

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