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School plans made public

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Architects and engineers are hurriedly expanding the floor plans for four new Montgomery public schools, trying to make sure construction begins and ends on time.

Updated preliminary schematic designs for three of the schools — the new George Washington Carver High School, Bellingrath Middle School and an unnamed middle school in east Montgomery — received good reviews this week from school board members and Superintendent John Dilworth.

Drawings for the fourth school, the new Jim Wynfrey Wilson Jr. Elementary in east Montgomery, are still in the works. Board members should see that design within a few weeks, said Ken Upchurch of TCU Consulting Services, one of the firms working on the project.

The updated designs incorporate suggestions made by the public and school system officials at workshops last month.

"The architects have been pretty much torn loose to start designing," said Gerald Adams, assistant superintendent for operations.

Board Chairwoman Mary Briers and her colleagues gave the drawings a glowing review.

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Briers pointed to the "pod" concept, suggested for each proposed school. Each building would be made up of pods, one for each grade level. Each pod has an assigned number of students and teachers, making it a school within a school. Students' lockers would be within their pod, eliminating the need to walk through the school between classes.

Montgomery Public Schools is entering the first phase of a \$303 million renovation and building plan being financed by city, county and public education dollars.

"The citizens of Montgomery, along with the city and county governments, have been critical partners in this effort," Dilworth said.

The schools chief is excited about the progress being made on the designs.

"Our staff, the architects and engineers, and our project managers have been diligent in making some very ambitious deadlines," Dilworth said.

Construction contracts for the two middle schools and the elementary campus could be let for bid as soon as August or September, Adams said. The contracts for Carver could be let in November or December.

Bellingrath, Wilson Elementary and the middle school should be complete by August 2008, Upchurch said. The new Carver High School should be ready by August 2009.

The deadlines are tight, he noted.

"We're under a lot of pressure," Upchurch said. "We're steadily making progress and trying to close the gap. Everybody is working very hard. We want to see these schools started and delivered on time."

The first phase includes six additional projects that Upchurch said architects haven't started.

■ Dalraida Elementary School: An addition and renovations to newer classrooms.

■ Pintala Elementary: A new school.

■ Highland Avenue Elementary: Board members are undecided on whether to build a new school.

■ E.T. Davis Elementary: New school.

■ Floyd Middle Magnet School: Officials are still discussing whether to move Floyd from its current Lebron Road location to Harrison Road.

■ Booker T. Washington Magnet High School: Board members are reviewing plans because the \$4 million earmarked to build a performing arts center falls short of the cost.