

# Erie High demolition draws near

## Board approves razing burned-out horticulture lab

By Ed Palattella

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Wrecking crews will soon join the workers preparing Erie High School for the first day of classes on Aug. 28.

Demolition and initial reconstruction of the school's burned-out horticulture lab are expected to start in a week after the School Board approved a bid for the project on Monday.

In an 8-0 vote with one absence, the board accepted the \$435,000 bid of Erie-based E.E. Austin & Son Inc. The district solicited bids from two other companies, but only E.E. Austin submitted a bid, according to district records.

The demolition of the lab, in the north, or "C" Wing of Erie High, is scheduled to start in a week, Superintendent Brian Polito told the School Board at a special meeting. The board awarded the bid under expedited and emergency bidding procedures so that the work will be done as quickly as possible. The accidental fire that destroyed the lab and the floor above it broke out in the lab the early morning of May 26.

E.E. Austin as part of the job will also install a structural steel shell and temporary walls, which will represent the initial reconstruction of the lab. The district wants the shell and walls in place before Aug. 28 so construction crews can rebuild the lab while school is in session. The district wanted none

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The Erie School Board on Monday awarded a \$435,000 bid to Erie-based E.E. Austin & Son to demolish a burned-out section of Erie High School and install a structural steel shell and temporary walls.

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of the demolition to occur after Aug. 28.

Insurance is covering the cost of the fire-related repairs and renovations to Erie High, formerly Central Career & Technical School. The district created Erie High through the merger of Central and East and Strong Vincent high schools.

Fire-related remediation and repairs have been under way at Erie High since June 7, when the School Board accepted the bid of another company, BMS CAT, with offices in Cleveland, to fix the smoke and water damage throughout the 500,000-square-foot school.

The district said almost all of the remediation will be done by Thursday, when the ServErie social service organization will lead a volunteer effort to paint and clean up Erie High, a project that was announced before the fire. All but a few areas will be accessible to the volunteers, Polito said.

"The remediation is getting very close to getting finished," he said.

"That's pretty remarkable, given where we were," School Director John Harkins said.

Board President Frank Petrunger Jr. said he is pleased with the speed of the work at Erie High.

"We are on a good pace to have opening day," he said.

The demolition had been delayed while insurance investigators had access to the horticulture

lab. They are trying to determine whether the fire started due to malfunctioning rechargeable batteries in a laptop or handheld drill. The investigators finished their on-site work on Friday, Polito said.

The School Board on Monday awarded several other bids related to the work at Erie High. The work went to the lowest responsible bidders, the board said. The companies are from Erie.

- Replacement of wood block flooring in damaged areas: \$250,000 to E.E. Austin.

- Replacement of motion detectors and other elements of the alarm and security system: \$12,920 to New Sentry Systems-Mecco Alarms.

- Window glazing and glass replacement: \$18,300 to Parsons' Penn Glass.

- New window blinds: \$27,032 to Today's Interiors.

The district also reached a deal to relocate welding classes while work continues on Erie High's welding lab, where equipment rusted because of water from the fire suppression and rain falling through the damaged roof. The classes will be held at the Erie County Technical School on Oliver Road in Summit Township.

When the relocated classes are in session, the district will pay \$131.89 a day to the Erie County Technical School. The district will bus students there.

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