

SCCC plans may include classrooms, new building

Posted: Thursday, June 27, 2013 12:08 AM EST

Updated: Jun 27, 2013 12:22 AM EDT

NEWTON -- An engineering firm has been hired by Sussex County Community College to put down on paper some of the ideas as to what the campus could look like a couple of decades from now and, in the near future, how the college could use nearly \$6 million in state and county financial help.

At Tuesday's meeting of the college's Board of Trustees, Stan Puszcz, managing partner of CP Engineers, said the firm's work will focus on three areas that need attention before this fall and the expected opening of competitive bids for grant money.

By the expected Oct. 1 deadline, the college needs to have about 30 percent of the design and engineering work done for a project which, at this point early in the process, could be a four-floor building with about 16 classrooms, including larger lecture hall space.

The \$5.8 million is the college's share of a \$750 million bond issue for capital projects to all schools of higher education approved earlier this year by the state Legislature.

SCCC has already received one round of funding for a so-called "dark fiber" network and associated equipment. The main route of the network is being built into Newton by Atlantic Health to serve Newton Medical Center but would allow plenty of capacity for the college to built access to that network.

The money will also help county high schools to access the high-speed, high-capacity network by linking to the SCCC system and its faculty.

On Wednesday, college President Paul Mazur stressed the prospective building is a "work in progress" and at this point, "It's totally in the concept stage."

He said the \$143,240 contract with CP Engineers is for the firm to do the work needed to develop the plans, which a steering committee of campus officials and faculty has been developing.

"The last master plan was done in 2009," Mazur said, "and there's been a lot of changes since then."

He said the most pressing need seen by the committee was for more and larger classroom space, since nearly every classroom on campus has a capacity of 30-35 students.

The college is taking on more courses from four-year schools being taught on campus, so there is a need for larger classrooms as well as the bigger lecture halls more common on larger campus.

"We're looking to take on those classrooms, but not see an increase in operating costs," Mazur said.

The state, which would provide 75 percent of the grant with the county providing the other 25 percent, wants to see an updated school master plan.

"We need to have those long-term plans fleshed out in order to apply for the short-term," he said.

At the trustees' meeting, Puszcz said the work would involve three phases or areas of study, beginning with documenting what facilities are on campus and local and state regulations on what can be done.

He noted that the prospective location of the classroom building, which lies within the boundaries of Newton, would not be impacted by local zoning and has access to the town's water and sewer all of which are a plus. Part of the campus also lies within Hampton Township.

The second task is the school's strategic plan, which he described as determining the business of the college and what's needed to proceed with that business.

The third task will be to develop the documents that the college will need to submit for the bond when the submission period opens.

Puszcz said the state will require projects that are buildable and with at least 30 percent of the pre-construction work done when paperwork is submitted for the grants.

In addition to the possible new classroom building, he said the plan is also looking at modernizing space in the science building.

In other action, the trustees approved a new three-year contract with the union that represents the professional staff.

The contract calls for a general raise of 1.75 percent and, Mazur said, brings much of the language in the contract to correspond to language in the contracts for the other two unions, which have also settled for the same 1.75 general raise.

Those contracts expire on June 30, 2015.

In addition, the trustees gave 1.75 percent raises to all non-union positions on campus, effective July 1.