

FIRM SEEKS TO BLOCK SCHOOL CONTRACT

Bid document could swing \$5.25 million Central project

by Charles Lussier, The Advocate

A Baton Rouge construction firm has gone to court seeking to block a competitor from signing a contract to build a ninth-grade academy at Central Middle School.

Cangelosi Ward General Contractors filed the lawsuit Wednesday against the Central school system.

The firm is seeking a permanent injunction as well as damages and court costs. The case has been assigned to state District Judge Wilson Fields, but no court date had been set as of Thursday afternoon.

Superintendent Michael Faulk said Thursday he heard about the lawsuit but hasn't seen it yet.

"I'm going to consult with our attorneys and see how to proceed," Faulk said.

The Central School Board agreed unanimously April 14 to award the bid for \$5.25 million to Buquet & LeBlanc Inc., of Baton Rouge, rather than Cangelosi Ward. Buquet & LeBlanc's bid came in \$22,000 less than Cangelosi Ward.

Buquet & LeBlanc submitted the lowest of seven bids, but Phil Rutter, of PBK Architects, urged eliminating it from consideration because it failed to supply a required document, an "Affidavit of Non-Discriminatory Employment" attesting that it's an equal opportunity employer.

Rutter recommended awarding the job to the next highest bid, submitted by Cangelosi Ward. Faulk was planning to go along with that recommendation.

But at the meeting, attorneys with Buquet & LeBlanc and Ken Sills, Central's attorney, determined the missing document is not necessary under state law and therefore need not bar the awarding of the contract to Buquet & LeBlanc.

In its lawsuit, Cangelosi Ward argues the Central School Board should have stuck with its architect's recommendation.

"A public entity may not simply waive its own stated and published requirements in the bidding documents," write attorneys with Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips, who are representing Cangelosi Ward.

Ted Laperouse, an attorney with Taylor Porter, said he's not sure how long the matter will take to get to court, but that his client feels strongly that it was wrongfully passed over.

"We believe that it's clearly a violation of the public bid law," Laperouse said.

The other six bidders submitted the affidavit; Buquet & LeBlanc did so after the bid opening, which was too late, according to Cangelosi Ward attorneys.

Faulk said the school system has yet to sign a contract with Buquet & LeBlanc.

The attorneys representing Buquet & LeBlanc could not be reached for comment.

The work on the two-story addition to the high school, 10200 E. Brookside Drive, is set to be completed in June 2015 — in time for the start of the 2015-16 school year.

The high school already has a freshman academy. The new ninth grade academy is meant to free up space for the upper grades and provide the ninth-graders a school-within-a-school setting.