

Group Wants New School To Be Green

By EMILY SHARRER

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HARRISONBURG — A group of environmental advocates has a question for the Harrisonburg City School Board: Could the new middle school be a “net zero school”? In layman’s terms, that means a school that emits no carbon and generates all of its energy needs through renewable sources.

The coalition, known as the New Middle School LEED/ ZEB Project, formed about a month ago to petition the school board to go green with the design for the new middle school.

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‘Opportunity To Teach Students About Energy Usage’

Green FROM PAGE B1 LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, is a program overseen by the U. S. Green Building Council that lays out a framework for building efficiently. ZEB stands for zero energy building. The designation is given to buildings that puts out zero carbon emissions and produce the energy they consume through “green” sources like solar or wind power. Designing the public building without energy efficiency in mind would be irresponsible, the group’s leaders say. “Buildings are large consumers of energy and large producers of emissions,” said Bishop Dansby, a co- leader of the environmental coalition. “So when you have a chance to build an energy efficient building and it doesn’t cost any more — and certainly not significantly more — than an inefficient building, then you certainly have a moral responsibility to do The verdict is still out on whether the middle school will be stamped with LEED or ZEB status, but energy efficiency is a priority, School Board Chairman Steve Barranco said.

“I think it’s something we’re considering,” he said. “We’re in those initial stages of really defining what’s important to us and what direction [the architect is] supposed to drive, but energy efficiency will be in there.”

The middle school will be built on Garbers Church Road, either on Harrisonburg High School’s

existing softball field or next to the entrance of Heritage Oaks Golf Course on several acres owned by the city. The building is needed to ease crowding in city schools and would free up Thomas Harrison Middle School for use as an elementary school.

“ When we were looking at architects, one of the aspects that we took into consideration was their background and experience with energy efficiency,” Barranco said. “ Now, whether that means that we become LEED certified or we just seek out the greatest level of energy efficiency possible, we’ll see.”

Dansby and the LEED/ ZEB project coleader, Jeffrey Tang, say that making the school a net zero building could come at a relatively low cost for the division. The school could purchase its own renewable energy source — the group is proposing a solar array — which would pay for itself, albeit over many years, through cost savings on energy. Or the division could enter into a contract with a thirdparty, known as a “ power purchase agreement,” which would pay to have the panels installed.

In general, building to LEED specifications is becoming more affordable, Dansby said.

“ I think it’s mainly because contractors are becoming more accustomed to the design requirements and the material requirements,” he said. “ LEED certification is more about what you do, not about how much you spend.”

For example, building a structure with lots of natural lighting, and fixtures that use less energy are simple and cost effective, Dansby said. Indeed, Dansby and Tang, whose children will attend the new school, said thinking about how much the building will save in energy costs in the long term is key from both environmental and economic standpoints.

Building an efficient school also provides an apt learning opportunity, Tang said.

“ It’s an opportunity to help teach the students about energy usage [and] energy consumption,” he said. “ This is going to be an issue that today’s middle school students are going to be addressing in their lifetimes.”

A petition started by the group online has more than 270 supporters.

Superintendent Scott Kizner said the timing to consider the options is just right.

“ This is perfect because plans haven’t been designed yet,” he said.

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_ Bishop Dansby, co-leader of New Middle School LEED/ ZEB Project

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