School board votes to build new Altama Elementary on current school site

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The Glynn County Board of Education voted Tuesday to begin the site approval process to build Altama Elementary School’s replacement on the same site as the current school.

The school board voted unanimously 6-0. School board member Linda Bobbitt was absent from the meeting.

The vote included the approval to begin the mitigation of wetlands on the school property.

The selection process for the site of Altama Elementary School’s replacement facility has been ongoing for several months. Some people in the community have expressed concern that a nearby former Hercules landfill would cause health concerns for students if the new school were built on the current school’s property.

Tests conducted during the past few months to measure potential health risks came back negative, school officials have said.

“No one at this table or sitting out here wants to put anybody in harm’s way,” said school board member Millard Allen. “... I think we’ve done what we need to do.”

Michelle Drew, principal at Altama Elementary, said she supports the school board’s decision.

Before the vote, Rachael Thompson, project manager for the Glynn Environmental Coalition, addressed the board and asked that it take several actions on the site if it votes to build the school there.
“Keeping in mind that the community has repeatedly asked for a local community school, we believe that additional actions can be taken to diminish the potential human health risks,” she said. “However, our initial recommendation would be not to build the school on the current site, which is less than 1,500 feet from the Hercules 009 Superfund site.”

Glynn Environmental Coalition’s recommended actions included continuing data collection on the site, requesting Hercules treat the benzene plume on the Superfund site and requesting that Hercules install sentinel wells to monitor potential risks.

In other business, the school board heard a project update from representatives of McDonald Construction Company, which has been contracted to build Burroughs-Molette Elementary’s replacement.

At a work session on March 29, Glynn County Schools architect John Tuten and executive director of operations Al Boudreau shared their concerns that the project had fallen behind schedule. The school board members asked that representatives from the construction company attend the next school board meeting to answer questions and confront those concerns.

Troy Meeks from McDonald Construction assured the board Tuesday that the project is on schedule, despite delays that have occurred throughout the building process.

Meeks said the project should be completed and ready to move into by January.