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Firm defends record before WPCC board

Spokesmen for Odell Associates of Charlotte went before Western Piedmont Community College trustees Tuesday night to defend the firm's long-time record with the school.

The college board of trustees had written the architectural firm, which designed seven WPCC building projects, expressing displeasure with performance on two projects and asking for a $5,000 rebate in fees.

The question of a rebate was dropped by the board once Jack Copeland and Roy Thompson, associates with the company, argued that the firm had esperienced disappointment and financial loss because of decisions relating to it's current project—vocational-technical program additions at the campus.

From the time of conception to the time bids were let, the square-foot cost of the additions rose from $28.93 to over $50, with the college having to reduce space by one-third to absorb the cost.

Thompson acknowledged the price estimate had been off, crediting part of the difference to the firm's lack of experience with fire science technology and part to a more competitive construction market in the area.

"We made a basic mistake," he said, "in estimating the amount of building we should get with the dollars you have."

The architectural firm is losing money on its fee, he said. For every fee dollar paid by the college, the architectural firm is spending two. A smaller firm, Thompson added, could not have absorbed the difference.

In addition, the allowed fee for the project set by the state was approximately $7,000 less than the firm had estimated.

Trustee Robert Smith, with concurrence of other board members, said Odell Associates should have notified the college earlier than it had that construction prices were rising. This would possibly have prevented delays in construction and occupancy and the need to readvertise bids.

"It is not the college's fault," vice chairman Sam Brinkley added. "It's ...the fault of the architects."

Smith also questioned whether the project had received the attention from the firm a larger project would have gotten.

Thompson countered both concerns, saying full attention was given, that several delays came while waiting for state-level reviews. He said the aspect of "real importance" to the trustees was more the delay in occupancy date than the "dollar impact," adding that the college was getting full value for its money.

The firm itself was "surprised, disappointed, hurt and financially penalized by the cost problem," Copeland said.

In other business the board:

—Voted to embark on a long-range roofing maintenance Buildings and grounds staff will be trained for the job. An experimental type of installation will be tried on "C" Building in an attempt to stop a leaking problem.

—Heard a report from Finance Officer Kenneth Clark noting that state-allocated funds are "in sound condition," with 52 percent of the funds expended with 58 percent of the year passed. The local budget was tight, but adequate, he noted, with expenses paralleling allocations at 58 percent each.

—Learned of a $7,852 cost overrun to be corrected by a transfer of funds from unused personnel allocations. A chiller froze and ruptured in September, Clark said. Insurance covered $25,000 of the $35,000 repair cost, still leaving the college with an unexpected large expenditure in the repair budget.

—Commended employee James Huffman for saving the college several thousand dollars with an energy-saving utilities program.

Board members present included Chairman E.W. Phifer Jr., Sam Brinkley, Robert Carr, Robert Tolbert, W. Stanley Moore, Donald Smith, Claude Sitton, John Carson and Ray Childers.

The presence of an additional member would have been needed for the board to act on proposed bylaws amendments.