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By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

In a 5-1 vote, the USD No. 480 school board voted Monday to hire a construction manager at risk, or CMAR. Board member Steve Helm was the sole dissenting vote. The board's construction committee, of which Helm is a member, selected the firm JE Dunn Construction of Kansas City, Mo., for the job of overseeing contract negotiations — if the public says “yes” to an upcoming bond issue.

That's a big, and potentially costly “if” — but it's not the district or the taxpayers who have assumed the risk. It's the CMAR company.



“JE Dunn is not paid anything for their services at this point,” said USD 480 auxiliary services director Robert Burkey. “It's all contingent on a successful bond issue. If the public says ‘No,’ there's no cost to the district.”

If no project has been finalized, why hire a CMAR?

Accuracy in cost estimates, said Burkey. The construction consultants will work with DLR architects on crafting real proposals for projects that the public has said it wants. With community meetings around Liberal all week, the district, DLR and the VISION team of volunteers hopes to get a clearer picture of what voters want. That information will then be presented to JE Dunn for cost estimates.

If and when a bond issue is approved, JE Dunn will oversee the building process. Only then will the construction firm be paid for its services. Burkey said retaining the firm is a win-win move.

“You don’t want to do a project this big piecemeal, on your own,” said Burkey. “It might seem like taking the lowest bid for everything is the best way to go, but it’s not. These guys, once the community says what it wants, can get the scope of the project and save us money.” In its last large construction project, Burkey said, the district saved \$700,000 by using the services of a CMAR.

In Wednesday’s paper: A closer look at how CMAR works, and more information about JE Dunn.

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