

Richards out as schools project chief

Richards

WATCHDOG FOLLOW-UP

MEAGHAN M. MCDERMOTT

@MEAGMC

There's been a shake-up of leadership in the volunteer board overseeing the largest public works project in Rochester history.

During an organizational meeting on Tuesday, former Mayor Thomas Richards was defeated in his bid to remain chairman of the Rochester Joint Schools Construction Board, which supervises the ongoing \$1.3 billion effort to rebuild and modernize the city's schools.

Richards had chaired the board since March 2014. He was appointed to the board earlier that year by thenschools Superintendent Bolgen Vargas after he lost his re-election bid to

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current Mayor Lovely Warren.

By a 4-3 vote, the board elected as its new chairman Allen Williams, who currently works as director of special projects in the Warren administration. Williams has been on the board since April 2015, and served as member of the city school district's Board of Education from 2008 to 2011.

Elected on Tuesday as the construction board's vice chair was Mike Schmidt, chief operations officer for the city school district.

Three board members are picked by the superintendent of Rochester schools, three are picked by the mayor and one is a joint appointment.

The leadership change comes on the heels of a controversial decision made by the board last week when, in a split vote, members opted to scuttle a project labor agreement with local construction unions for Phase II of the multiyear project. The agreement included requirements for union hiring, minority hiring goals, wage agreements and other construction rules.

At issue in that vote was whether a similar agreement for the project's Phase I was successful. Only five women or minority apprentices ended up working on Phase I as a result of that agreement, although larger goals for minority hiring were met. More than 20 percent of all workers in Phase I were minorities.

Richards supported keeping the labor agreement intact, while Williams did not. During Tuesday's meeting, it was clear project leaders do not yet know whether the leadership change would alter the time lines for construction in Phase IIA. The board is already seeking bidders for work at Monroe High School, and that

project has an anticipated completion date of fall 2017. But the bidding documents need to be altered now, and non-union firms given the opportunity to bid.

Calls by the *Democrat and Chronicle* to Richards for comment were not immediately returned.

MCDERMOT@Gannett.com

