



PRESS RELEASE

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With the successful passage of the November 2019 bond referendum, Owatonna Public Schools opened the next chapter on its high school. Through a collaborative process involving dozens of stakeholders, the new high school will be a model of learning for many years in our community. Construction is underway on the new facility with an opening date of fall 2023. Follow the progress on the Owatonna Public Schools website: www.isd761.org.

The school district is now working on how the existing high school facility story continues. As part of the referendum, a second question passed, providing funding for the school district to repurpose the existing high school site for school district uses. While the district is open to many possibilities, using a portion of the site to consolidate their current District Office and Rose Street facilities has been identified as a top priority well-suited to the site. However, these uses would occupy only a portion of the current building and surrounding campus, which leaves an open question about what else might fit and be compatible with the neighborhood.

With that in mind, the district has been collecting input over the past year on how the community would like to see the site used. In the spring of 2021, the district launched a section on the Engage Owatonna website about the existing OHS building, where people weighed in on suggested uses of the site. Many ideas involved uses outside of the school district's mission and would likely need funding for conversion and operations, requiring outside partnerships. To date, no viable partners have emerged to re-develop or update the site with the school district.

In the fall of 2021, the School Board commissioned the Existing OHS Citizens' Task Force, formed of a wide variety of community stakeholders, to review the information gathered to date (including ideas submitted via Engage Owatonna) and help advise on the best way to make use of the existing high school site and facility. That group met four times and reviewed extensive information gathered from the community as well as information about the current status of the facilities and site.

Through extensive discussions, the group developed a set of criteria that any uses of the site should adhere to. These criteria set out expectations to help guide the development on the site in ways consistent and beneficial to the neighborhood and the City of Owatonna. They also provide for and help set priorities for the district's needs.

As the Existing OHS Citizens' Task Force nears the completion of their work, two recommendations have emerged: to consolidate the appropriate district functions on the existing high school site, and to continue to seek partners to redevelop other portions in a way that would benefit the community.

Consolidation of the district functions would place the district office in the 'C' tower on the northwest corner of the site. This area of the building would also house the professional development meeting spaces currently housed at Rose Street as well as itinerant staff who serve multiple school buildings. The district maintenance storage and shops would take over the Ag Shop building near the tennis courts. The district also recommends relocating gymnastics into the gym space. The district recognizes the need and potential to utilize the current gymnasium to provide more space for the gymnastics program and spectators.

No other entities have emerged as potential partners interested in the remaining parts of the campus. While many good ideas have been collected, it is now time for someone with the expertise and resources to make a proposal. In an effort to locate suitable and capable developers, the community task force has endorsed a plan to issue a Request for Preliminary Proposals from developers. This RFPP is available on the district website and will be sent to interested parties. It asks interested parties to share both their ideas for re-use as well as an outline of their proposed development process and funding. Results of this RFPP will be available in early March and shared with the community task force before they finish their work.

The School Board is scheduled to hear the recommendation from the task force in March. Shortly after, the School Board will make the final decision on how to proceed. Whatever the final solution is, planning will likely commence this summer. This will provide ample time for public bidding and contracting in time to start construction in the summer of 2023, just as the high school programs are moving to the new high school.

Look for updates on the progress of the task force and the School Board over the coming months.

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