

# District 37 adds partial land sale to Avoca Center option list

By **Kathy Routliffe**

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**A** year after outlining two possible futures – sale or renovation – for the former Avoca Center school, Avoca District 37 officials said last week they now have three options: razing the building and keeping the land, selling the entire property, or selling some of it.

One-time building tenants have either moved out of the building at 3013 Illinois Road, or will move out early next year, Superintendent Kevin Jauch told about 25 people gathered Nov. 8 at Marie Murphy School.

That includes Arlyn School, a private school for students with emotional problems, which moved to Highland Park Oct. 31, and One Hope United, a private day care business, which plans to move to a new Wilmette location on Old Glenview Road early next year, district financial officer Beth Dever said.

School board president Rick Zelinsky promised listeners the district won't make a decision this year, but does plan to do so before the end of 2018.

"What we don't want to do is have a vacant building for some length of time," he said.

Zelinsky said the district would "ideally" find a partner like another government body to work with, if it were to decide to raze the building and keep the land. Just knocking the building down could cost about \$500,000, in part because asbestos and a potential underground oil tank would need to be dealt with, Dever said.

The property is zoned for residential use, and selling all 4.2 acres of land on which the building is located would provide District 37 with an immediate influx of cash and future property tax revenue when it goes back on the tax rolls, Zelinsky said. The property could be developed for between 10 and 16 single family homes, he said.

The newest option district officials are looking at – subdividing the property and selling some of it – would still provide some cash and some future tax revenue, while allowing the district to keep some property as green space, he said.

The district isn't selling approximately 6.5 acres of land to the south of the Avoca Center parcel, which is used by the Wilmette Park District for athletic fields, Jauch told questioners.

The district last met with residents about the former Avoca Center School in October 2016. At the time, Jauch said it would cost an estimated \$6.7 million to renovate the building, which would probably require bond sales to finance.

The school board decided last December not to renovate the now 60-year-old building. It also decided to end Arlyn's and One Hope United's long term leases by giving both organizations a 12-month notice.

Since then, Jauch said, the district has tried to work out agreements for the land, the building, or both, with the village of Wilmette, the Wilmette Park District, Loyola Academy and the Winnetka Park District, without success.

The district wants to focus on renovations, including state-mandated life and safety renovations, at Marie Murphy and Avoca West, its two active schools, Jauch said last week. District officials estimate it will cost about \$17 million to complete that work.

Jauch and Zelinsky fielded questions from roughly a half dozen audience members, some of who said they hoped the property could be developed into a playground or outdoor environmental education area for students and neighborhood children. Others asked about potential future flooding problems if the property was developed.

Zelinsky said the district board plans to continue discussions about Avoca Center.

"It is critical that we continue to get your feedback," he said.

[\*kroutliffe@pioneerlocal.com\*](mailto:kroutliffe@pioneerlocal.com)

*Twitter: @pioneer\_kathy*

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