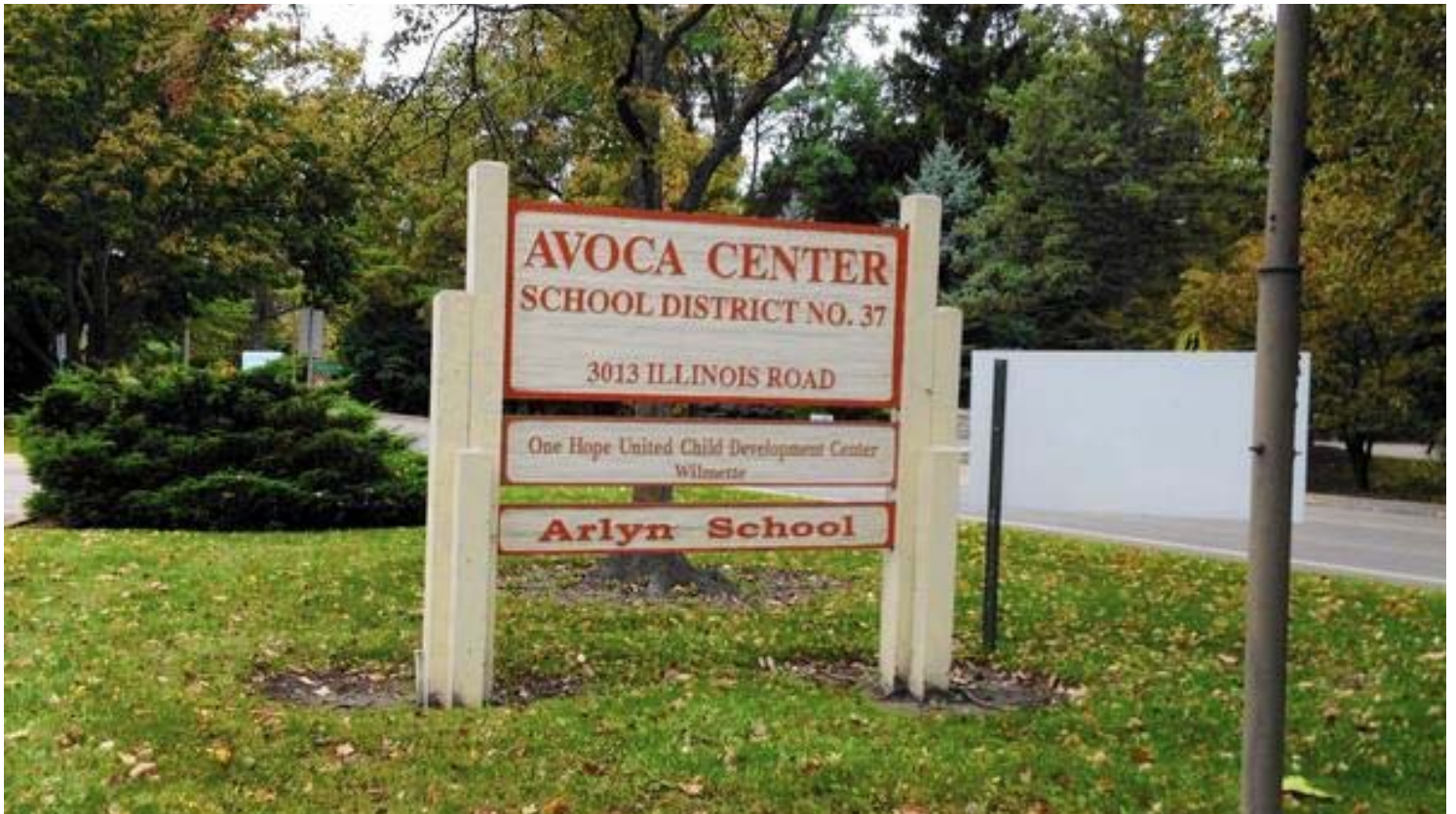


District 37 will take more time to decide fate of Avoca Central



Officials at Avoca School District 37 want to hear more about potential ways to maintain tenants at Avoca Central before deciding the fate of the building, District Supt. Kevin Jauch said Nov. 16. (Kathy Routliffe / Pioneer Press)

By **Kathy Routliffe**
Pioneer Press

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Avoca School District 37 officials appear to be putting the brakes on any immediate decision on the former Avoca Central School. School board members now want administrators to research what might make it possible to keep the district's two building tenants, Arlyn School, and the One Hope United day care center, in residence.

District Superintendent Kevin Jauch said last week that after a Nov. 3 committee of the whole session, trustees asked him, and Beth Dever, the district's chief financial officer, to look at scenarios other than selling the property at 3013 Illinois Road in [Wilmette](#), or renovating it at the district's expense, for an estimated \$6.7 million.

The board wants to learn, among other things, what a renegotiated lease with the two long-time tenants might have to look like to make keeping the building financially feasible, Jauch said.

"We could talk about the cost of paying for our tenants to be temporarily displaced, we could talk about price per square foot, and what kind of net income the district would need to realize in order to pay for renovations," he said.

He said school board members asked for the information after hearing from area residents and tenant representatives.

The district draws students from Wilmette, Northfield, Winnetka and Glenview.

At an Oct. 26 community meeting at Avoca Central, Jauch said the district was at a crossroads when it came to affording the building, and might have to sell the property, ideally to a residential developer who would put the property back on the tax rolls, or renovate the building, replacing its aging boilers and updating mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.

Costs of maintaining the school, which opened in 1957 and closed in 1977 after district enrollment plunged, have averaged just under \$231,000 per year over the past eight years, Jauch said. The district earns a little more than \$400,000 in rent annually, netting a little over \$161,000 after maintenance costs, according to Jauch.

On Oct. 26, Dever said breaking even on the total cost, even with potentially higher rents, could take between 37 and a half to 61 years.

At the time, district officials said the school board could make a decision on Avoca Central as early as Nov. 3, but board members decided they needed more information, Jauch said last week.

"The next important decision is whether or not we terminate the lease we currently have with our tenants," he said. The existing leases run until 2020, and require District 37 to give tenants a year's advance notice before they have to vacate the premises. The leases also require District 37 to help its tenants find new quarters, Jauch said last month.

One Avoca tenant would rather stay in the building, even if it requires a temporary move during any potential renovations. Judy Goldstein, Arlyn School's executive director, said she took that message to the school board's Nov. 3 committee of the whole session.

Goldstein said her private therapeutic day school, which works with up to 50 students between ages 10 and 21 with emotional and social disabilities, has been at Avoca Central since 1995, and wants to remain there.

Goldstein said she hopes to get more financial information from the district as soon as possible, something she said she asked for Nov. 3. She needs to give that data to state officials, since Arlyn's ability to charge rates – which in turn helps determine its ability to handle any potential rent hikes – requires the approval of the Illinois purchased care review board run by the state board of education.

"I have no numbers to crunch, and I basically said give me some numbers to work with," she said. "Until and unless I have those numbers, I can't submit information to Springfield."

In a Nov. 18 email, Beth Lakier, One Hope United's vice president of early learning and child development, said her organization would also like to stay in the building. However, she said, "we are taking proactive steps to find an alternative space in Wilmette in the event we need to move."

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