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Board of Education
Paxton-Buckley-Loda C.U.S.D. #10
700 W. Orleans
Paxton, IL 60957

May 14, 2019

Re: PBL Eastlawn School, 341 E. Center, Paxton, IL

To the Paxton-Buckley-Loda Board of Education:

On behalf of Landmarks Illinois, I write to address the planned demolition of Eastlawn School in Paxton. Landmarks Illinois is a membership-based nonprofit organization serving the people of Illinois. We are an on-the-ground advocate, offering technical assistance, practical resources, small grants, and access to strategic partnerships to give people the tools they need to save the important places in their lives.

Public Not Presented with Option of Private Reuse

The Paxton-Buckley-Loda school district engaged the public in four community engagement sessions in 2016 to evaluate school facilities. The options offered for each building were limited to either continued use as a school or demolition. The public was not presented with a full range of options for sites to be vacated, such as Eastlawn. Specifically, these options would be:

1. Use school district funds to demolish Eastlawn, resulting in an unimproved lot in school district ownership.
2. Market the Eastlawn school building for private reuse via a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Private rehabilitation would result in job creation, tax revenues, and avoids the \$1.15 million cost of demolition.

The community engagement sessions and subsequent referendum language presented demolition as the only alternative. We believe a reuse option that could generate economic activity, leverage state and federal incentives, and prevent taxpayer-funded demolition is worth considering.

Illinois Communities Benefit from School Reuse Projects

As school buildings have closed due to consolidation, declining enrollment, or new construction, communities across Illinois have used the opportunity to reuse and reinvest in their historic school buildings via the private market. These projects often leverage Federal Historic Tax Credits (20% rehabilitation tax credit) and as of January 1, 2019, Illinois has enacted an additional State Historic Tax Credit (25% rehabilitation tax credit).

Recent school rehabilitation projects have included projects in Bloomington, Rockford, and Paris, Illinois. In Bloomington, the former Bloomington High School provides apartments in a building currently being renovated via the Federal Historic Tax Credit. (See "State OKs historic status for old BHS," *The Pantagraph*, February 24, 2018, attached). In Rockford, a developer converted the former Turner School into the District 2 headquarters for the Rockford Police Department. (See "Rockford police to move into District 2 headquarters at former Turner School this year," *Rockford Register Star*, July 27, 2016, attached). And in Paris, the vacant former high school building was attractive to developers for reuse as senior housing because of available tax credits. (See "Old Paris High School graduating to senior housing," *Tribune-Star*, July 10, 2016, attached).

These projects, among others, have sparked sizable private investment in a vacant public building. These are often win-win for the public bodies and taxpayers, in that they avoid a large-scale demolition and associated costs while adding a property to the tax rolls.

Eastlawn is Eligible for the Federal and State Tax Credits

On May 13, 2019, the former Paxton Community High School (Eastlawn) was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to the recognition as a valuable place worthy of preservation, this designation opens the door to significant financial incentives for private reuse.

With this determination of eligibility for the National Register, a reuse project at Eastlawn could take advantage of a 20% Federal Historic Tax Credit. In 2018 alone, this historic tax credit program has sparked \$6.9 billion in rehabilitation projects across the country. Communities are leveraging this federal incentive to spark economic activity and job creation. Eastlawn offers this opportunity to Paxton.

As previously mentioned, Illinois recently enacted a State Historic Tax Credit. The Illinois Historic Preservation Tax Credit will provide a 25% credit for historic rehabilitation projects. This competitive tax credit includes five priorities, including a

priority for structures previously owned by a federal, state, or local-governmental entity. This will help to incentivize projects that reuse public buildings, including schools such as Eastlawn.

The Planned Demolition is Likely to Require State Review

Given the size of Eastlawn and the scope of the demolition, the project is likely to require a permit from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) for storm water discharges associated with construction site activities.

Any construction project requiring a state permit also needs to comply with Section 4 of the Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act (20 ILCS 3420/1 et. seq.). This Act requires consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, for undertakings that adversely affect historic resources.

Following the determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, it is established that Eastlawn is a historic resource. Demolition, as the indicated course of action by the school district, is clearly an adverse effect. As such, the Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act requires a consultation to evaluate alternatives that “could eliminate, minimize, or mitigate [the] adverse effect.” (20 ILCS 3420/1).

Pausing demolition plans and seeking private reuse proposals via a RFP process is one way in which the school district could eliminate the adverse effect to historic Eastlawn.

Landmarks Illinois is a Resource

Landmarks Illinois has worked on several projects across Illinois which have marketed public buildings for private reuse. In Belleville, city officials had planned to demolish a former hotel building in the downtown for a small city park, which would require city funds for long-term upkeep. In 2016 the city changed course and, working in collaboration with Landmarks Illinois, issued an RFP to evaluate reuse of the Hotel Belleville. The building had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2014, making the building eligible for the Federal Historic Tax Credit.

In August of 2016, it was announced that developers would convert the former Hotel Belleville in to apartments, investing \$12 million in downtown Belleville. In the announcement, the developers cited the Federal Historic Tax Credit as a “critical source” of financing for the project. (See “\$12M redevelopment plan for Belleville’s

Meredith Home moves forward," *Belleville News Democrat*, August 1, 2016, attached).

We encourage the school board to work with local advocates and organizations like Landmarks Illinois to evaluate alternatives and leverage incentives prior to moving forward with demolition plans at Eastlawn. Vacant school buildings offer an opportunity for reuse, job creation, tax revenue, and community pride and we hope that Paxton's Eastlawn can join the growing list of success stories.

Sincerely,



Frank Butterfield
Director, Springfield Office

Enclosures:

"Old Paris High School graduating to senior housing," *Tribune-Star*, July 10, 2016

"State OKs historic status for old BHS," *The Pantagraph*, February 24, 2018

"Rockford police to move into District 2 headquarters at former Turner School this year," *Rockford Register Star*, July 27, 2016

"\$12M redevelopment plan for Belleville's Meredith Home moves forward," *Belleville News Democrat*, August 1, 2016

cc: Paxton City Council

https://www.tribstar.com/news/local_news/old-paris-high-school-graduating-to-senior-housing/article_bffca1e9-fd44-5475-8d4a-fa3de3216862.html

FEATURED

Old Paris High School graduating to senior housing

By Nick Hedrick Tribune-Star Paris, Ill. Jul 10, 2016



Tribune-Star/Jim AvelisMain Street stability: Plans are in the works to use the old downtown Paris High School for senior housing. Some 42 units will be built into the 100-year-old building.

JA



Paul Ruff looked around the dimly lit main entrance inside the old Paris High School, looking at the staircase that led generations of teenagers to class.

"There's been a lot of foot traffic up and down that stairway and these halls," said Ruff, Paris's city administrator and 1966 PHS alum.

The hallways fell quiet last fall when students moved to a new campus, but preliminary steps are underway to bring the 108-year-old building a second life.

Springfield, Ill.-based Laborers' Home Development Corp. has approached the city — which owns the property — with plans to re-purpose the main building as senior housing. The developer is a non-profit affiliate of the Laborers' International Union.

Called Tiger Senior Apartments — a homage to the school's mascot — the 42-unit building would be geared to people ages 62 and over, said Mike Goetz, who's overseeing the project.

Hard construction costs are estimated between \$7.5-8 million, he said. The firm is applying for tax credits from the Illinois Housing Development Authority to help finance the project.

Goetz said they hope to purchase the building by the first or second quarter of 2017 and begin rehabilitating the block-long Main Street landmark that summer. Worn Jerabek Wiltse, of Chicago, is the architect.

Ernie Eveland Gym and the vocational classroom building on the campus are not included and will remain in the city's hands.

Events are held in the 1940s-era gym and a couple rooms in the vocational building are rented. The rest of the vocational building is used for storage and another possible project is in the works, but Ruff said it's too early to discuss specifics.

In restoring the main building, the timing was right, Ruff said. The city took over the entire property when the new Paris Cooperative High School opened on East 1200th Road in August.

Ruff said the city had been working to find new uses for the main building. "It has too much of a presence in the downtown area to be allowed to just deteriorate," he said.

Laborers' Home Development had noticed the building in the past. The firm also developed the 92-unit Maple Ridge Apartments near Paris Community Hospital.

Goetz said they were attracted to the former school's downtown locale and close proximity to local amenities.

"It's a very beautiful building, so I doubt we'll make any significant changes to the exterior structure," he said.

The building has been deemed a local historic landmark by the Paris City Council, accepting a recommendation from the city's historic preservation committee.

On a recent afternoon, Ruff grabbed a set of keys and made the short walk from his office to the school. Unlocking an enormous gate, he walked between the school buildings and opened a door to the old cafeteria.

Ruff flipped on the lights, bathing the room in bright orange. One of the walls was emblazoned with a tiger and paw. A clock hung permanently frozen at 1:54. The roll-up window in the food serving line was open, offering a glimpse of the kitchen area.

The tour continued up a staircase leading to the main entrance. Not far from the main doors sat the cavernous library.

"I've learned more about this building going through this process than I knew even I was a student," Ruff said, after walking back to the main entrance.

Across the street at Paris Carnegie Public Library, director Teresa Pennington has noticed the students' absence. Since the final bell rang, she said it's been a quiet year downtown.

The library and local businesses operated on the school's schedule and parking was often a premium. Library staff hung the athletic schedules on the bulletin board to avoid programming conflicts.

"To a certain extent, the high school was the center of activity," Pennington said.

A 1975 PHS graduate, Pennington said plans for the apartments sounded wonderful.

"It's a beautiful building, and having a chance to have it active and a part of the community again seems like a win-win situation," she said.

Reporter Nick Hedrick can be reached at 812-231-4232 or nick.hedrick@tribstar.com. Follow Nick on Twitter @TribStarNick.

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Rockford police to move into District 2 headquarters at former Turner School this year

By [Chris Green](#)

Staff writer

Posted Jul 27, 2016 at 9:29 PM

Updated Jul 27, 2016 at 11:08 PM

ROCKFORD — For decades the Rockford Police Department has operated out of one building. By the end of the year, that will change.

The long-awaited transformation of the old Turner School at Broadway and 10th Street into the Police Department's District 2 headquarters is expected to be completed by December.

Mayor Larry Morrissey was joined today inside the gutted historic school building by other city officials who praised the collaboration between a consortium of bankers who stepped up to finance the \$10 million project and the Rockford Area Local Development Corporation, the developer and landlord for the police station.

“There’s a ton of work that happens behind the scenes to make a deal like this work,” the mayor said. “Alpine Bank has just been an absolutely critical leader willing to work and partner with the city, not only in this project but also the huge, huge project out at the airport with the [MRO](#) being built. Again, thank you to Alpine Bank for your incredible commitment to this community and leading by example, investing your dollars here ... to ensure our community is moving forward.”

Blackhawk, Northwest and Stillman banks are the other area banking partners who made the funding possible. The school, which dates to 1898, is being redeveloped by Turner School, LLC, an arm of the Rockford Local Development Corp. RLDC will use historic tax credits to help finance the project and [lease the building](#) to the city for \$432,000 a year. The city will have the option to buy the building after the tax credit period has expired.

John Phelps, RLDC executive director, said the closing process came about quickly despite the complexity of the tax credit financing.

New Police Chief Dan O'Shea praised the efforts of those who came before him to make geographic policing a reality and spoke of the merits of the city's decision to move police operations out of the downtown Public Safety Building and into three district buildings.

"It's a very important initiative as we try to foster more community engagement and community involvement to resolve a lot of quality of life issues in the city as well as some of the crime issues," he said.

District 1, defined by everything west of the Rock River, will have a newly constructed building located at West State and South Avon streets. District 2 is bordered by the river east to 20th street, and District 3, everything east of 20th Street, will have its headquarters located in the former New Towne Post Office, 557 New Towne Drive.

Construction of all three stations is estimated to cost up to \$23.7 million. Officials hope to have all three districts open in 2017.

O'Shea District 2 will house investigations, and the police brass will operate out of District 3.

The city has been looking at moving out of the Public Safety Building since 2000 and at geopolicing since 2008.

The Winnebago County Sheriff's Department and Rockford Police Department shared the building until the Sheriff's Department moved in May 2007 into the newly built Justice Center at 650 W. State St. Meanwhile, Winnebago County officials, who pay the lion's share of the operating costs for the outdated PSB, want to raze the building.

Chris Green: 815-987-1241; cgreen@rrstar.com; [@dhrisfgreen](https://twitter.com/dhrisfgreen)

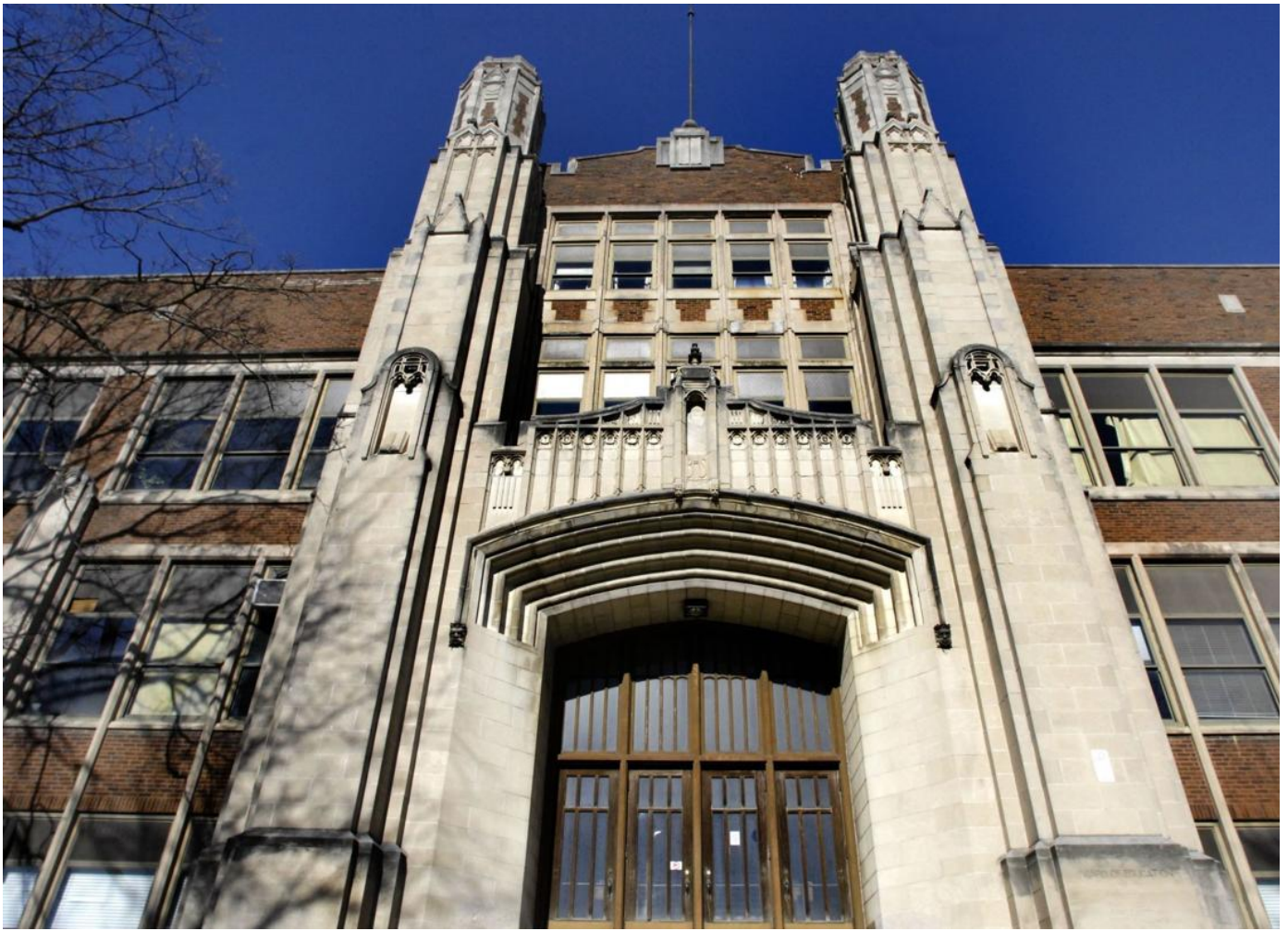
BREAKING Tim Conway, Emmy-Award-winning comedian of 'The Carol Burnett Show' fame, dead at ...

https://www.pantagraph.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/state-oks-historic-status-for-old-bhs-normandy-village/article_0a7d8c56-bb3b-5cfa-bbcb-72d3571c5de5.html

State OKs historic status for old BHS, Normandy Village

Derek Beigh dbeigh@pantagraph.com Feb 24, 2018

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Sunlight gleams off architectural highlights Jan. 30 at the former Bloomington High School at 510 E. Washington St. W

SPRINGFIELD — Two Twin City historic sites are going to the final stage of consideration for the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Park Service will decide whether to list the former Bloomington High School at 510 E. Washington St. and Normandy Village, eight former cottages at the former Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School in Normal, after a state board signed off Friday.

"It's a big day for Bloomington and Normal. It's not very often, I'm guessing, one community has two historic sites approved in one day," said Bob Broad, who owns Normandy Village and attended Friday's Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council meeting. "We're pretty excited for the whole community."

Dan Monroe, the council's chairman and an associate professor at Millikin University in Decatur, said members were impressed by both applications.

“I thought both historic sites had a lot of integrity. They’re great, very consistent sites in terms of their historical integrity, and the nominations were very well-written and well-argued,” said Monroe. “The council was very pleased with both of them and delighted to approve.”

The council's recommendation now goes to the deputy state historic preservation officer, who is expected to send the applications to the National Park Service. The sites could be added to the register within 45 days.

Officials hope to get federal grants for site improvements that become available once they're added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Both currently house various businesses.

“The best hope of keeping it (the former high school) going as a viable tax-producing entity is to do an adaptive reuse like what they’re considering, which is housing for senior citizens” and commercial space, said Sherry Graehling, head of the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

The register already includes several Twin City locations, including Broadview Mansion, 1301 S. Fell Ave., Normal.

Follow Derek Beigh on Twitter: [@pg_beigh](#)

Derek Beigh

Normal and McLean County Reporter

BELLEVILLE

\$12M redevelopment plan for Belleville's Meredith Home moves forward

By Mike Koziatek

mkoziatek@bnd.com

AUGUST 01, 2016 09:04 AM, UPDATED AUGUST 01, 2016 10:48 PM





Mike Lundy and James Nations of SWIDA talk about the proposed Meredith Home redevelopment. BY MCCLATCHY

Belleville aldermen on Monday night heard a proposal from a team led by the [Southwestern Illinois Development Authority](#) and a St. Louis company for the \$12 million redevelopment of the former [Meredith Home/Hotel Belleville](#) into commercial space and senior apartments on the upper floors of the brick building that towers over the Public Square.

The City Council voted unanimously to authorize city staff to enter into negotiations on a redevelopment agreement for the project.

SWIDA and the Bywater Development Group of St. Louis would be the co-developers of the project.

Mike Lundy, executive director of SWIDA and former treasurer for the city of Belleville, sent the city a report detailing the group's proposal.

Federal affordable housing and historic building tax credits would be used for the majority of the financing. The proposal calls for \$8 million in funding from the affordable housing tax credits and \$2.1 million from historic building tax credits. Also, the funding includes an Illinois Housing Development Authority loan of \$1 million.

SWIDA has not asked for tax incentives from the city but the developers could ask for an incentive from the city at a later date, according to Jim Nations, board chairman for SWIDA.

The development team will seek to have the building placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This designation provides a “critical source” of financing in the form of federal historic rehabilitation tax credits, according to the proposal.

It is vibrant and people tend to love to be around people as long they can go back to their own space and this building will offer that.

Jim Nations of SWIDA comments on downtown Belleville and the Meredith Home redevelopment plan

Nations said he thinks the project will be successful because downtown Belleville is filled with thriving businesses.

“It is vibrant and people tend to love to be around people as long they can go back to their own space and this building will offer that,” Nations said.

Nations acknowledged that finding enough parking for the development is a challenge.

“We know it is a very problematic issue,” he said. But he noted that senior housing requires fewer parking places than other possible uses of the building such as a hotel because some of the residents will use public transportation or rely on family and friends for transportation.

When asked if the city would provide assistance on the parking, Nations said, “We don’t know.”

The developers have budgeted \$300,000 to address the parking issue.

Nations said it’s possible the project could be finished in two years.

He also said the apartments would be designed for “active seniors” and would not be a nursing home.

Ward 5 Alderman Phillip Silsby acted as chairman of the City Council meeting because Mayor Mark Eckert was absent because he scheduled to undergo surgery this week.

Silsby said the redevelopment plan would be a “great way” to protect the 85-year-old building.

“The proposed rehabilitation will restore and preserve all of the critical architectural features of the building, both on the interior and the exterior,” according to SWIDA’s report.

This work would include:

- Restore main floor hotel lobby, including restoration of Art Deco ornamentation, terrazzo floors, columns and cornices.
- Restore masonry/terra cotta.
- Replace all windows with new historic-compliant windows.

The plan calls for a new roof and elevator as well as new plumbing, heating, air conditioner and fire suppression sprinkler systems.

For the project to qualify for affordable housing tax credits, income restrictions are placed on the apartment applicants, who must be 62 or older. The residents cannot earn more than 60 percent of the area median income.

Under these guidelines, a one-person household can earn a maximum of \$29,580 annually and a two-person household can earn a maximum of \$33,780.

The Hotel Belleville opened in 1931 and in the 1960s the Belleville Diocese took over the building at 16 S. Illinois St. and operated the Meredith Home for the elderly. The city bought the building in 2010 for \$487,500 from the diocese.

SWIDA's proposal calls the developers to buy the building from the city. The proposal budgets \$500,000 for buying the property.

After the city bought the building, Belleville attorney Bruce Cook agreed to give the city \$500,000 and in exchange, the city would tear down the building a park would be built there in honor of Cook's later daughter. The city has since returned Cook's donation and put a moratorium on demolishing the building.

The other development team members include: Worn Jerabek Wiltse Architects of Chicago; Thouvenot, Wade & Moerchen of Swansea for civil engineering; Holland Construction of Belleville as general contractor; and Lafser and Associates of Creve Coeur, Mo., as historic consultant.

Mike Koziatek: [618-239-2502](tel:618-239-2502), [@MikeKoziatekBND](https://twitter.com/MikeKoziatekBND)

 **COMMENTS** 

