

Finance Committee will consider developer's \$85,000 offer to buy acre after getting appraisal that sets value at \$200,000

The Grafton School Board agreed Monday to continue exploring the possibility of selling an acre of land to a local developer who wants the property to expand an assisted-living facility near Grafton Elementary School.

The board tabled taking action on Lew Herro's offer to buy the land for \$85,000, instead referring the proposal to the Finance Committee, which will also consider an appraisal that sets the market value of the land at \$200,000.

Late last year, Herro told district officials he needs an acre to build an addition to Luella Heights, a 17-unit community-based residential facility he owns and operates at 1710 Washington St. The facility, which opened two years ago, is in an 11,300-square-foot, L-shaped building at the northeast corner of Washington Street and 17th Avenue.

Herro said an addition at the north end of the building would provide another 17 living units for the facility, which serves adults 55 and older who have special needs. He said he offered \$85,000 as a purchase price based on an appraisal of nearby property and as a "starting point in negotiations."

Supt. Jeff Pechura said the district's appraisal, which was done by Kaysen Realty Valuation Co. of Grafton, was paid for by Herro, who offered to cover the cost when he appeared before the board last month.

"It's now going to be up to the board to decide if the district should keep the land for future needs or sell it because there isn't a foreseeable need," Pechura said.

Board members said they heard from several residents opposed to having the property sold even though the district has not earmarked it for future use.

"One person told me that if we sell this, there are many reasons we will regret it down the road," said Board President Terry Ziegler, who suggested the land could be used to expand district-owned tennis courts north of Luella Heights.

School officials weigh options for land sale

Written by Steve Ostermann

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However, Pechura said Tuesday expanding the courts will probably not become a major priority for the district in the near future, primarily because enrollment at Grafton High School is not expected to increase.

“We expect to see a drop in enrollment and then leveling off,” Pechura said. “We don’t think we’ll need to expand the tennis courts for school purposes.”

The Finance Committee is scheduled to review the Kaysen appraisal at its Thursday, Jan. 28, meeting and make a recommendation on the proposed land sale for the board to consider in February.

Pechura said the high school athletic director and coaches will also be asked for input on possible uses of the site.

Herro, who formerly worked as the district’s business manager and served as treasurer on the School Board, declined to comment on the \$115,000 disparity between his offer and the market value of the land in the appraisal.

“I haven’t seen the appraisal document yet,” he said Tuesday.

However, Herro said he is willing to negotiate to acquire the property.

“I’m 100% committed to do what’s right for the district and my (business) partner and myself,” he said.

If the board decides to sell the land, the transaction will have to be approved by a vote of district residents at a special meeting or the annual meeting, Pechura said.