

School officials negotiating with Briggs & Stratton to acquire 44 acres after property passes environmental tests

With an exhaustive environmental analysis of the Simplicity proving grounds completed, the Port Washington-Saukville School District is negotiating to purchase the 44-acre Town of Port Washington parcel from Milwaukee-based Briggs & Stratton Corp., Supt. Michael Weber said last week.

Administrators, who first approached Briggs & Stratton in November 2008, received School Board approval to negotiate the purchase in December 2009 and hoped to present a proposed agreement to the board in February.

Environmental testing, however, took longer than expected, Weber said. The analysis shows there is no contamination on the land off Highway LL that for decades has been used to test snowthrowers and lawn tractors.

“Formal negotiations have started. We’ve presented them with our list of considerations and they are reviewing it,” Weber said. “They’re still interested in selling and they’re not talking to anyone else. With each step this deal is looking more promising.”

The property is considered one of the few sites in the district suited for a school. Although there is no immediate need for a new building, administrators said the property, acquired by Briggs & Stratton in 2004 as part of its purchase of Simplicity Manufacturing, represents an opportunity that’s too promising to ignore.

“Green space is so precious right now. Let’s not miss the opportunity we have now,” Weber said last year.

The fair market value of the property was estimated at \$852,000 last year — \$528,000 for the land and \$342,000 for a 10,800-square-foot manufacturing facility on the site.

The depressed real estate market also makes it an attractive time to purchase property, administrators said. Jim Froemming, director of business services for the district, said the value of the property decreased by \$150,000 between 2007 and 2009.

The district is in a position to pay cash for the property or it could pursue a low-interest loan, administrators said.

The district already owns 50 acres of undeveloped land just north of Grand Avenue in the City of Port Washington, but the Simplicity property is a better site for a school because it is essentially flat, located between Port Washington and Saukville and has good access off Highway LL, Weber said.

Both sites are considered to be too small for a modern school complex, which should be about

PW-S district in talks to buy Simplicity land

Written by Bill Schanen IV

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70 acres to accommodate a building, parking lots and athletic fields. The Simplicity site is attractive, however, because it is adjacent to undeveloped land the district could try to purchase.

The other property owned by the district has limited access, is surrounded by subdivisions, and is generally considered an investment rather than a potential school site.