

New School News

December 20, 2016

Site Selection

Since the November 2014 ballot was approved, Bemidji Area Schools have studied, evaluated, and finally approved a site to construct Gene Dillon Elementary School. We evaluated three sites for the school: Adams Ave near Bemidji High School, at the intersection of Middle School Rd and 15th Street, and Becida Rd and County Rd 7 (Division St). Here are some of the major points the Board considered with each site.

Adams Ave Site

The school district owns a large tract of land surrounding Bemidji High School (approximately 230 acres). A new school could be added to the property (although we would need to request a change on its planning and zoning designation from conservation to a different classification). Factors supporting construction at this site included district ownership, proximity to district's Maintenance Facility, BHS, and staff could share facilities with BHS for student activities (i.e., gym, soccer fields, school forest, and outdoor education opportunities). Factors not supporting this site included traffic congestion at BHS would likely be compounded, site would eliminate part of the school forest and established recreation trails, objection voiced by neighbors along Adams Ave, only one road access in and out of the school site (Adams Ave) and the road is not constructed for large vehicle traffic. City water and sewer are not readily accessible, except through extended private service lines.

Middle School Rd Site (Gordon Property)

The school district initially purchased this property from Bemidji HRA at a cost of \$760,000 for the construction of Gene Dillon Elementary School. We purchased approximately 32 acres of the 37 acre site with the HRA retaining ownership of five acres along 15th St for future development. Factors supporting this site included soccer fields and Bemidji Middle School nearby, closer to center of town than other sites, facility would be close to student bus transportation transfer point at Bemidji Middle School, City sewer and water were nearby and accessible. Factors not supporting this site included small amount of buildable land due to significant change in site elevation, possibility soccer fields could be developed by property owner, requested easement for buses was denied requiring buses to navigate steep elevation change, traffic study called for costly traffic management improvements along Middle School Rd, 15th St, 23rd St, and Conifer Ave, and improvements would need to be paid by school district reducing the size or quality of the new school construction, lengthy list of building requirements and delays in approval process.

The district sold this property back to the Bemidji HRA for the original purchase price less HRA expenses.

Becida Rd/Division St Site (Tarutis Property)

The school district has long been interested in the 160 acre Tarutis property located approximately one-half mile west of Bemidji High School, in Grant Valley Township. With a school site requirement of 25 acres, this site leaves much room for expansion of athletic facilities, playgrounds, and space to meet other district needs that may arise in the future. At a purchase price of \$599,000, the property is seen as a value compared to the \$760,000 price tag on the 32 acre Gordon property. Factors supporting this site include ample size, location in Grant Valley Township, natural environment including a small lake, trees, and level ground to construct the school. It is located close to Bemidji High School and the District Maintenance Facility, which supports sharing instructional and maintenance staff and equipment. Factors which limit this site's desirability include it is not presently supported by City sewer or water services, although the City and school district are working on a plan to serve the facility with services rather than construct a large subsurface septic system. The site will add to traffic along Becida Rd, Division St, and Adams Ave and will need several traffic management improvements in order to safely and efficiently operate. The site includes what has been designated a "sensitive area lake" and with that designation there are development restrictions and requirements from the County's Planning Commission which have been addressed. Minnkota Power Coop has a high voltage power line that runs through the property. This power line will need to be moved for student safety and aesthetics. Minnkota has agreed to share the cost of relocating the power lines with the school district.

The district has a purchase agreement to obtain this property for the construction of Gene Dillon Elementary School.