

School district office move discussed

By Hillary Gavan Senior staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, October 7, 2015 4:00 pm

BELOIT — Although most residents urged the School District of Beloit to consider moving its administrative offices to either the now vacant Morgan Elementary School or keeping them at Kolak Education Center, Rory Owens encouraged the district to finally let Kolak go.

"We are making strides and making Beloit beautiful. Let's really say Kolak has served its purpose. How much money have we really wasted and we still see the building crumbling?" he said. "Let's just say thank you Kolak, thank you Roosevelt. Let's look somewhere else."

Owens and others in the community spoke out at a listening session Tuesday evening at Morgan Elementary School. The session scheduled so the public could weigh in on the decision of where to move the district's administrative headquarters.

One site under consideration is Morgan Elementary School which closed this spring, or other locations including in the downtown. Although the BMO Harris Bank Center was being considered at one time, Board of Education President Shannon Scharmer said it's no longer being considered. The plan is to vacate Kolak by August of 2016.

Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Janelle Marotz kicked off Tuesday's meeting by announcing an offer had been accepted on McLenegan Elementary School at 2639 Sunshine Lane as well as on the portable trailer at Morgan Elementary School. In an interview after the meeting, Board of Education President Shannon Scharmer explained McLenegan sold for \$375,000 to a church, Madison Pentecostal Assembly Inc.

Marotz also said there is strong interest in the Royce school building and noted the district has accepted an offer for Kolak. Commonwealth Development has announced plans to turn the Kolak site into an apartment complex.



Speaking out on school

Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News
Harvey Kopp speaks out at a listening session at Morgan Elementary School on Tuesday evening. He urged the School District of Beloit to consider using Morgan as its administrative headquarters.

At the current Kolak office, Marotz said 23,000 square feet of office space is used as well as conference rooms and loading docks. Kolak has 56 employees and 81,000 square feet for parking. However, Kolak was built in 1921, has limited spacing and would need significant investment to secure entrances and to be fully handicap accessible, Marotz said.

To renovate Morgan Elementary School, Marotz said it would cost \$4.1 million. The estimated cost for brand new construction would be \$6.2 million.

Marotz said there would be challenges for re-using the district's existing buildings. At Morgan, for example, the ceilings are low, and there is a lack of storage space and parking. Utilization would be very difficult as the school's five additions make for a challenging layout. To use any existing school building for the administrative offices would include asbestos abatement and improvements to roofs, windows, lights, boilers and electrical systems.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, several residents of the Morgan neighborhood expressed concerns with the district not moving its administrative offices to Morgan and potentially selling it to a business which could create too much traffic in the neighborhood and disrupting its character.

Harvey Kopp said the Morgan name means a lot to people in Beloit and has merit. Kopp said he'd like to see it remain and possibly become Morgan Education Center. When he heard about the district moving its offices downtown, Kopp said he wanted to stress how there are many eating places and amenities available near Lee Lane in addition to ample parking.

With the administrative offices located at Morgan, Judy Geissler said administrators will be close to the new Fruzen Intermediate School as well as other nearby businesses. Unlike downtown which would be concrete, Geissler said the Morgan site would offer a beautiful area to walk in and a park to dine in.

"It would be an asset to our neighborhood, but also an asset to you. It would show people we are moving our way up," Geissler said.

Arne Brostuen said he was under the impression during discussion surrounding the referendum that Morgan would be used as the new Kolak Center.

Board of Education member Dennis Baskin said he would research if there was an agreement made by a former superintendent Steve McNeal and residents to have Morgan become the district's administrative offices.

"Sir, I'm going to do some digging and knock on some doors. If that was the agreement, I'm going to push for this. As a board member that's where my conscience lies, and I'm going to honor that," Baskin said.

A man from the Kolak neighborhood reminded the board that while there is an accepted offer for it, there has also been some vehement opposition to it. He said wanted to see Kolak become an updated administrative center.

Matt Finnegan said public world throws old buildings away, while the private sector picks them up. He said he'd like the district to consider staying at the Kolak center and doing a public private investment for adaptive reuse of the building which could include renting out some of the space.