

Board looking at several sites to move offices

By **HILLARY GAVAN** Senior staff writer | Posted: Thursday, September 24, 2015 4:00 pm

BELOIT — The School District of Beloit will be holding a listening session from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 6 at Morgan Elementary School to discuss relocating the district's administrative offices.

Offices would move from Kolak Education Center. Sites said to be under consideration are Morgan Elementary School, which closed this spring, or other locations including downtown Beloit.

The board has been meeting in closed session to discuss a variety of locations to move administration into, including some in Beloit's downtown such as the BMO Harris Bank Building, 500 E. Grand Ave. The plan is to vacate Kolak by August of 2016, according to Melissa Badger, spokesperson for the district.

Board member John Acomb said the district inquired about the BMO Harris Bank Building, 500 E. Grand Avenue, but has not heard back from the owner regarding the property yet.

Some time ago, Acomb said the board also considered the former First United Methodist church property at 511 Public Ave. when considering potential downtown locations.

However, on Sept. 18 it was reported the church is being acquired by Hendricks Commercial Properties. While plans are not finalized, Diane Hendricks told the Beloit Daily News the redevelopment likely will include a combination of parking along with a structure suitable for retail and office space.

"We took a tour of the church back when Steve (McNeal) was superintendent, and had considered it as an option. At that point we weren't serious, and the asking price was higher at that point. There was a lot of work that needed to be done and we didn't have a sense of urgency at that time," Acomb said.

McNeal retired from the district earlier this year to take a position as vice president of education services at Corporate Contractors, Inc., a Hendricks company.

Board Vice President Nora Gard said there also was discussion about the district moving to Beloit City Hall if the police department were to leave. However, she said, that plan was abandoned a long time ago.

Gard said there would be benefits to moving downtown Beloit such as having employees eating, working and shopping downtown. However, she said there is some uncertainty about the costs of

any potential move downtown. She said her “bottom line” would be cost and knowing if the site has enough room for offices and ample parking.

Acomb said he is open to possibilities in all locations.

“I really don’t have any favorite. I’m looking for more information. We scheduled a listening session at Morgan. We are still gathering information,” Acomb said.

When Beloit City Manager Lori Curtis Luther was asked about her thoughts regarding the district’s move to downtown, she issued the following statement in an e-mail:

"I think it would be extremely beneficial to have the School District offices located downtown to bring additional employees to support the growing vibrance of our City Center.”

On Sept. 17, Executive Director of Business Services Janelle Marotz updated the Beloit School Board on \$4.7 million worth of energy efficiency facility projects for consideration in next year’s budget, including \$1.8 million in energy upgrades to the vacant Morgan property.

Gard said any move to Morgan probably won’t be immediate. If the district doesn’t apply for the energy efficiency funds this year, it could request them next year if the district decides to move to Morgan.

Energy efficiency projects are paid for by a revenue limit exemption that’s given by the Department of Public Instruction. The state exemption accommodates spending for energy-efficient projects and the district receives approximately two thirds of the cost reimbursed the following year through state equalization aid.