



Lawrence Township school district buildings in play

By Tom Harton

The Lawrence Township school district is beginning an evaluation of some of its real estate holdings that could result in three of its buildings being sold and part of another being renovated to accommodate private-sector tenants.

The district last week hired Summit Realty Group to evaluate its assets and recommend whether certain district properties should be sold, leased, repurposed or redeveloped.

Robin Phelps, the district's chief financial officer, said she hopes to have Summit's recommendations ready for consideration by the school board next month. Once recommendations are approved, Summit can begin marketing the properties. Any transactions proposed as a result of that marketing would also require board approval.

The district's real estate needs began to shift after closed Craig Middle School, 6501 Sunnyside Road, before the 2010-2011 school year.

There was no plan for the 246,000-square-foot building when it closed, Phelps said, but the district later decided to consolidate several functions there, a move that left the fate of three other buildings in question. "We felt like we had enough property that we needed some professionals to help us," she said, noting that before hiring Summit the district had never hired a commercial real estate firm to evaluate its holdings.

Summit's work will involve four properties:

-The former Craig Middle School, now called the Lawrence Education and Community Center. The building, which opened in 1970, has been partially renovated since Craig closed and will soon house the district's administration offices. After the Oct. 20 move, employees will occupy the

first floor of the three-level building. The Lawrence Township Foundation and Compassion for Kids, a not-for-profit, also are housed in the building. The city of Lawrence is leasing part of the basement as a training facility. That leaves in play about 100,000 square feet on the second floor, space that might be renovated and leased pending a recommendation from Summit.

-The Education Services Center, 7601 E. 56th St. The 20,816-square-foot building, which opened in 1965, will be vacant after district employees move into the former Craig Middle School. The one-level building and three acres of land are adjacent to Belzer Middle School.

-Lawrence Operations Center, 8301 East 46th St. The 52,620-square-foot building, built in 1923 and once occupied by Lawrence Central High School, has in recent years been used for storage and to house the district's school maintenance division. Storage and the operations function were recently moved to the former Craig Middle School.

-The Center for Special Services Annex, 5626 Lawton Loop, East Drive. The 15,693-square-foot building on the site of the former Fort Benjamin Harrison is leased to Christians United Church. The Lawrence Township Foundation had occupied a part of the building, which is adjacent to 11 acres of land.

Summit principal Tim Norton said his firm will confer with the Fort Harrison Reuse Authority before making a recommendation about that property.

Norton said it's too early to say what Summit will recommend the school district do with its properties because his firm is just beginning to evaluate them. •