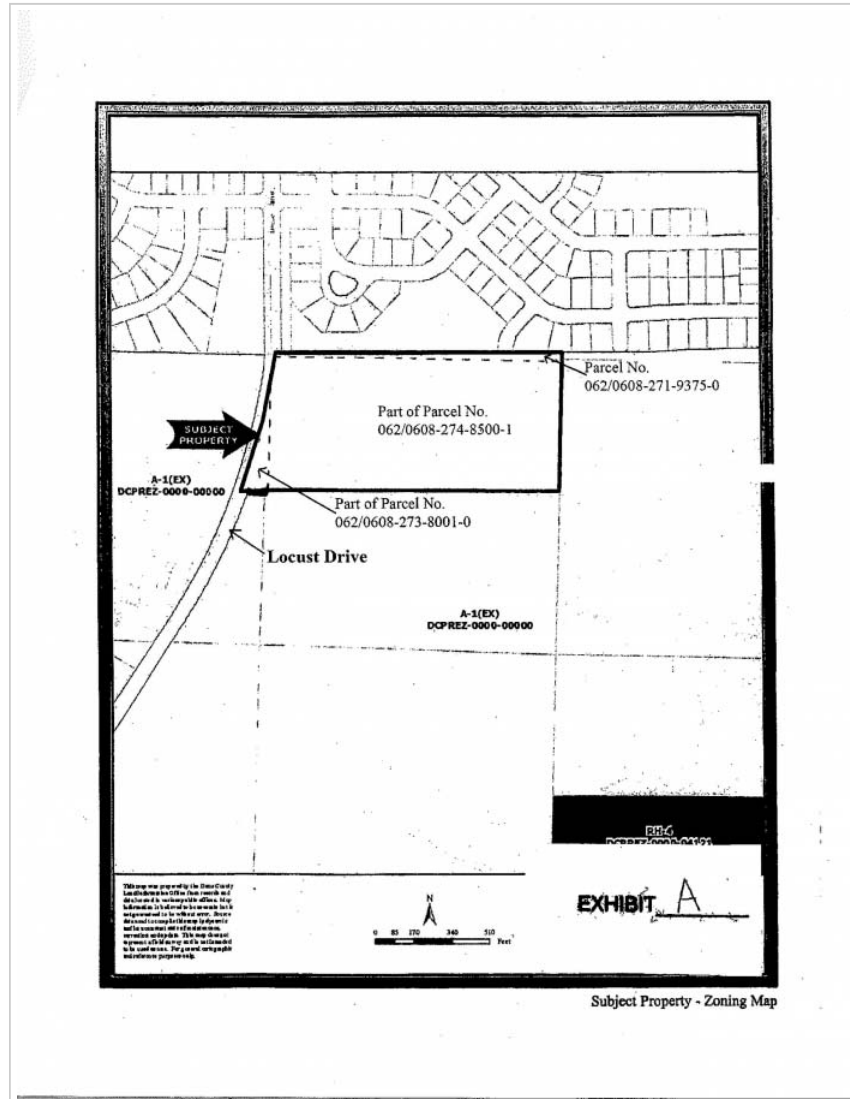


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Around \$8.5 million for three parcels likely on April ballot

By: Scott Girard



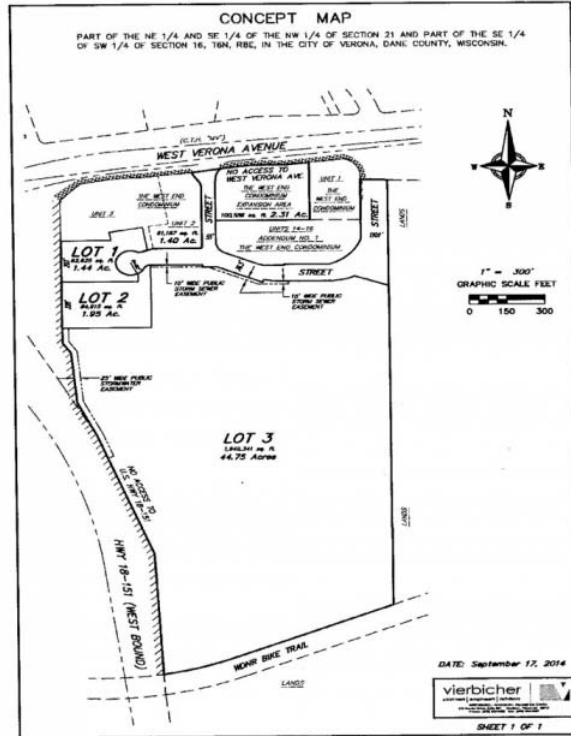
The properties

Property	Acreage	Cost
West End	45	\$3.75 million
Erbach	66	\$3.3 million
Herfel	18	\$1.44 million

Renderings courtesy Verona Area School District. The Herfel property, which is about 18 acres, is near the Cathedral Point housing development.

The West End property, which the board had previously approved for purchase, expanded by five acres in the new deal.

EXHIBIT A



10



VASD
Westside School Site
Conceptual Acquisition Plan

ERBACH PARCELS

EXHIBIT
A

JSD Professional Services
14-6247
7 August 2014

Note: Cost, acreage are preliminary n

The Erbach property next to the West End.

The Verona Area School District has been growing quickly for years, and officials don't expect that to stop anytime

In late 2013, the Board of Education began discussing potential land purchases, and Monday night it turned that conversation into action with a pair of land purchases and an extension of the previously approved West End acquisition contingent on voter approval.

The purchase of the three parcels, which will likely be on the April ballot as referenda, would total just under 130 acres for just under \$8.5 million, though exact acreage and price will be determined by upcoming surveys as part of the purchase agreements.

On top of an additional five acres in the previously approved West End purchase (45 total), the board also approved 18 acres in the adjacent Erbach property and at least 18 acres from the Herfel property in the Town of Verona.

Gorrell said there is also a fourth piece of land the board is looking at, though it's unclear if that purchase will be on the April referendum. An initial school board discussion last December suggested an interest in the North Neighborhood the City of Verona is planning on the southwest corner of County Highways M and PD.

"We're still contemplating ... north of Verona but we haven't finalized that," he said.

Both the Herfel and Erbach agreements include "option fees," money the district will pay the landowners regardless of what happens in an April referendum. If the referendums pass, though, the money would be folded into the purchase price.

The purchases do not necessarily mean a new school building is imminent, superintendent Dean Gorrell told the Press. However, elementary schools around the district are nearing or surpassing their capacities, especially at Cathedral Point, which would be the school most affected if another elementary were built on the Herfel property south of the Cathedral Point residential development.

While Gorrell acknowledged that is a natural place to start, he said the makeup of a school on that land would not be the traditional K-5.

"Do we think that we'll need to build new elementary schools sometime in the future? Yes, we do," Gorrell said. "I need to stay with the constant thinking about, for example, the current grade configuration? Or is there something we can do in the shorter term, meaning five to 10 years, that would stave off the building of an elementary school and a middle school?"

"Right now, we're K-5. What if we went K-3? What if we went K-4? What if we had a kindergarten center?"

Gorrell brought up his experience in seeing another district he worked at, in Urbandale, Iowa, go to a kindergarten center model, where all of the kindergarteners go to one building and the elementary schools become grades 1-5.

While Gorrell pointed out that such a setup creates space in the elementary schools and pools kindergarten resources in a central place, he also acknowledged it creates transportation questions and transition issues for young students who have to get used to two new settings in two years.

"You put your thumb on one (issue) and another comes up," he said of the considerations involved.

But that's not the only alternative option, and the Future Schools Committee, which the district created late last year to handle some of the questions surrounding school expansion, will likely look at all of those options, Gorrell said. A parcel having nearly 130 acres to work with would help.

"The legacy model is you typically need elementary schools before you need middle schools before you need a high school," he said. "That's typically the way it goes. The way this is laying out ... this would fall in line with that.

"But what if you did something different?"

West End

In May, the board approved a \$3.4 million deal for 40 acres of land in the West End development.

But the acreage of the land the board was purchasing has gone up by 4.75 acres, land previously zoned for retail commercial or multi-family use. That brings the price to the maximum \$3.75 million spelled out in the agreement.

The agreement still has conditions that must be met prior to the April referendum, including some that involve the West Verona and others involving road and access improvements.

Those contingencies were part of the reason the district was unable to go to referendum in November as originally hoped.

The lack of a second piece of land by the August deadline for that action was also a factor.

Erbach

One of the contingencies on the new West End agreement was the district's ability to enter an agreement with the neighboring Erbach property for a separate purchase.

The new deal does that, with a 66-acre purchase for around \$3.3 million, though the exact acreage and price is still to be determined.

With the two pieces of land totaling over 100 acres near the West Verona Avenue and U.S. Hwy. 18-151 interchange, the district would have plenty of options, Gorrell said.

"That could be a campus," he said. "That could be a high school, middle school and elementary school. There's a lot of space. You can put a lot of stuff on 100 acres."

Herfel

The final 18-acre property is likely the most near-term investment for the district, as it sits next to the Cathedral Point residential development. Cathedral Point and neighboring Scenic Ridge and

Hometown Grove have almost all of the roughly 300 undeveloped single-family lots in the city.

Students in that area currently attend Glacier Edge Elementary School, which grew by 49 students from last year on a preliminary Sept. 22 count by the district. That's 28 more students than the district had predicted.

"My own personal experience, this is a very kid-rich neighborhood, with little kids," Gorrell said.

But the Herfel land is not currently in an urban service area (USA), which allows development by connecting to a service. That would have to come after the referendum, Gorrell said.

The land would cost approximately \$1.44 million, if it were exactly 18 acres.

Long-term thinking

The purchases, Gorrell said, are a "longer-term" investment— especially given their major size – as schools around district at all levels near capacity.

"When you have an opportunity, you want to jump at that opportunity," he said. "I think if we were to wait another there'd probably be something else going on at Erbach and Vanta."

He pointed out that there's a limited amount of land in Verona, and if the district doesn't get some of it soon, it could be as more residential growth. That, of course, would compound the space issues.

That logic helps make such a big purchase worth the risk, Gorrell said.

"One-hundred years from now you could look back and say, 'That was the dumbest thing you could ever do,'" he said. "But you make the best decision at the time with the information that you have."

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