

Former elementary school site set for redevelopment

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COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa —The metro school families fought so hard to save will come down, but Council Bluffs Community Schools said it's upholding its commitment to neighbors to make the property's redevelopment purposeful.

The Council Bluffs School Board approved selling the Walnut Grove property near 28th and Avenue J Tuesday to a nonprofit organization Tuesday night.

New houses will go up on the land and, in the process, students will learn a lifelong skill.

More than a year after the last students left Walnut Grove Elementary School, the property's next chapter is taking shape.

"We were waiting and waiting to find out what they were going to do with it," homeowner Mandy Von Weihe said.

"The win-win-win is returns taxable lots to the city," Neighborworks Home Solutions Chief Financial Officer, Mike Koval, said.

Neighborworks is a nonprofit organization that develops and sells quality, affordable housing.

"We build to the neighborhood," Koval said. "We won't overbuild a neighborhood. We won't underbuild a neighborhood."

Homeworks plans to develop 14 homes with its new territory in the next seven years.

"This seemed like the perfect way to keep our promise to the neighborhood -- that we would bring something good in there, and to have it be related to our kids," Council Bluffs CSD Superintendent Dr. Martha Bruckner said.

The details are still taking shape and a deal is not official, but the plan brings in Iowa Western Community College's construction technology students. Those students will build the homes for Neighborworks, getting real-life, on the job experience.

"Being able to share civic engagement and community growth with students outside of the classroom are just some of those attributes that IWCC includes in the career and technical programs," IWCC construction technology chair David Hazelwood said.

Some homeowners voiced concern about the long timeline, but others are excited for the potential.

"Hopefully (it'll) bring some new families in," Weihe said.

Bruckner said the district will host a meeting with the nonprofit organization to share more information with the neighborhood as it takes shape. Neighborworks' developers plans go to the city for approval next.