



December 22, 2010

Dear Area B families and community members,

I am writing to inform the community about the latest developments concerning the Howe School site. Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) received five proposals for development of Howe. Of the five, two were non-responsive (one was an offer for Cooper; another was a charter school offer for Cooper as well as Howe). The other three were time-consuming, speculative, or produced little or no income for the district; the three would have left no green space, and one proposal would require taking down the building. As a result, the district is not accepting any of the proposals.

At the same time, MPS administration has been giving serious consideration to the idea of transforming the Howe site into athletic fields for Sanford Middle School. We are excited about the idea because it returns the focus to our primary mission of serving the students of Minneapolis. As we move forward, we would like to pursue this idea with the Sanford community and the neighborhood surrounding the Howe site. Following that discussion, we will bring the proposal to our Board for its consideration.

Sanford is a valued part of its community, with a student population that has grown fifty percent this year and is projected to increase again next year. To continue to grow and attract students, the school needs facilities comparable to those of other middle schools. Currently the school's athletic space is comprised of two 66 by 32 foot gyms, which the recent MPS facilities report determined were undersized for their purpose. Designated fields could be used for physical education classes during the school day, supplementing the existing gym space. Designated fields could also be used during recess to supplement the school's small outside play area. Sanford also has a large before- and after-school program, which could be expanded to provide more activity time if adequate facilities were available.

This proposal has several benefits for the neighborhood as well. Fields could be used for school-sponsored teams and neighborhood leagues that have been challenged to gain access to fields at other busy nearby parks, such as Longfellow Park. Developing fields on the Howe site would also benefit the neighborhood community by retaining green space and providing a location that would be open to neighborhood residents, teams and groups. This could be an opportunity for us to partner with community organizations to develop a shared investment in a space that could be enjoyed by all. In addition, MPS would be retaining the property, which could be used as a new school site if needed.

As we move forward, there are many questions that we will need to address. We do not have all the answers at this time, but we will work deliberately and promptly to develop a formal proposal and plan. We do know, however, that this idea addresses the needs of our students and our community. We will work with the Sanford PTA, perhaps with the Longfellow Community Council, to host a meeting at Sanford on January 25 to discuss this proposal.

Steven Liss
Chief Operating Officer
Minneapolis Public Schools