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City to buy former Geneva Elementary site

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GENEVA — Geneva City Council voted Monday night to purchase the former Geneva Elementary building from the board of education.

Geneva Area City Schools Superintendent Mary Zappitelli said the sale agreement will come before the board at the June 20 meeting.

“We acted on it. Now, it’s up to the school board,” said Geneva City Manager James Pearson. “It’s not a done deal until the school board accepts it.”

The property became available as a result of the merger of Geneva Elementary and Spencer Elementary schools into a new building this past school year. The school board no longer had a use for the property, which is near downtown.

“I’m pretty pleased that in working with the city and school district, we were able to make it happen,” Zappitelli said.

The city will purchase the roughly 3-acre site for \$162,000, “real close to the appraised value,” Zappitelli said.

The board and city began talking about the sale eight months ago, although the city’s interest in the property predates those discussions. Pearson said it is a “strategic piece of property” that will help Geneva continue to rebuild a vibrant downtown.

The property has been earmarked as the site of the proposed Geneva Wine and Culinary Center, which is regarded as a key economic development project for the area. The center will include incubator facilities for start-up wine and restaurant businesses, wine studies, lab services, wine tastings, food pairings, cooking classes and many other wine-related ventures. Pearson feels the 3 acres will be adequate for the center because city-owned parking surrounds the site.

The city will be purchasing a parcel that is clean and ready for development, Zappitelli said. The former school building was demolished, and site remediation work is nearing an end. She said it was the city’s preference that the building be removed.

Zappitelli said there was some initial interest in the property from other parties, but the Ohio Revised Code allows school boards to arrange a sale with a municipality or governmental entity without having to go through an auction.

The school board has not decided how the proceeds from the sale will be used. Zappitelli said there are legal ramifications, and the district will have to research those before proceeding.

Pearson said the city will use general-fund money to purchase the property but also will ask the state for permission to reprogram revolving loan funds for the project.

The proposed timeline puts the wine and culinary center's opening in May 2013.