

CSIU to purchase former elementary school?

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TURBOTVILLE — The Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) could be in line to become the new owner of the former Watsonstown Elementary School building.

During Tuesday's Warrior Run school board committee session, Superintendent Dr. Thor Edmiston announced the property has been appraised at \$610,000. He said CSIU has proposed to purchase the site for that amount.

The district vacated the building at the end of the 2015-2016 school year as it realigned its grades. The district now rents out part of the former school to CSIU for early childhood education programming, and to the Luzerne County Community College (LCCC).

The district also closed the former Turbotville Elementary School building at the start of this school year as a new elementary school was opened on the middle school/high school campus.

Warrior Run board President Doug Whitmoyer said he spoke with CSIU Executive Director Dr. John Kurelja prior to Tuesday's meeting.

According to Whitmoyer, Kurelja said CSIU intends to continue using the building as it currently is.

"(CSIU) has full intentions of leaving that college there as long as they want to be," Whitmoyer said. "The door is wide open for them to be there, unless something changes from the college point of view."

In an email following the meeting, Kurelja affirmed Whitmoyer's comments.

"If we do purchase the building through an authority, we would plan to continue our partnership with LCCC supporting and growing in whatever way we can the Greater Susquehanna Center," Kurelja wrote. "We believe that their presence in our region is an essential addition to dual-enrollment programs in high schools, post-secondary options for high school graduates, partnerships with four-year college and flexible, local workforce development training solutions."

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He added that CSIU hopes to grow its early childhood programs currently housed in the building.

Edmiston said the Defenders' Trading Post — a thrift store operated by students in the school district's Transition program — will also remain in the building.

Whitmoyer said certain criteria will be included in the sales agreement, including that a cyber school or charter school cannot be operated

out of the building.

If the sale goes through as proposed, Edmiston said it includes the entire property, including the Little League fields located to the rear of the building.

Jay Heater, a resident of the district, questioned why the district wouldn't divide the land and attempt to sell the parcels to the rear of the school building separately.

"That ground is worth a lot of money," Heater said. "I'm sure CSIU

doesn't need all that ground. They are getting a bargain."

Board member Robert Hormell thanked Heater for his comments, and stressed that a final sales agreement has not been approved.

Hormell also revealed the district spoke with Watsonstown Borough about any potential interest it may have in the property.

"There doesn't seem to be any interest from the school board... to divide that property," Hormell said.

In order for the sale to move forward, Edmiston said it must first be approved by the CSIU board of directors. If that occurs, it will then come back to the Warrior Run board to be voted upon.

The next CSIU board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 18. The Warrior Run board is next scheduled to meet Monday, Oct. 23.

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