

Del Mar, school plan to purchase land

Fundraising goal is \$5 million for site

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DEL MAR – The city and the private Winston School have joined forces to raise the estimated \$5 million or more needed by Del Mar to purchase the 5-acre former Del Mar Shores School site at Camino Del Mar and 9th Street.

The Shores property is owned by the Del Mar Union School District and was declared surplus last year. It once housed the Del Mar Shores School and the district's administrative offices, and it has the city's last remaining open spaces and playing fields.

The Winston School has leased about 3.5 acres of the property, including the former school buildings, since 1988. If Del Mar eventually acquires the property, the Winston School will get a 55-year lease on the space it now rents from the school district, according to a memorandum of understanding signed by the city and school on Monday.

Under the agreement, made public at Tuesday's City Council meeting, the Winston School will pay Del Mar \$197,245.39 a year for lease, utility and other expenses. It now pays about \$180,000 a year to the Del Mar Union School District, former Principal Mark Kimball said last year, and the lease expires this year.

The Winston School would be responsible for seismic retrofitting and the cost of meeting federal or state accessibility requirements under the agreement. The school also agreed to continue to use the premises for educational purposes and related activities only, and the city would have "limited rights" to use the facility for community events.

"I want to thank the city for the opportunity to make Del Mar our long-term home," Mike Peterson, Winston School's headmaster, told the council Tuesday. The school serves children with "learning problems in traditional classroom settings," he said.

The Winston School offers small classes and individual instruction for students who do not do well in the larger "standardized" school environment.

Del Mar does not have the funds to acquire the property on its own. So rather than see the property go to a private developer, the city and the school agreed to the joint fundraising effort.

"Del Mar is not growing like other California cities. We have lost population in the last 20 years, our population is aging, the economy is stagnant, and now our resources are delicately balanced to provide essential city services, but not improve infrastructure like streets, sewers and aging buildings," Mayor Crystal Crawford told the council during her State of the City address Tuesday.

The city's portion of the purchase price is being raised privately, and pledges of more than \$2 million have been made, according to Laura DeMarco, chairman of Friends of Del Mar Parks, which is spearheading the fundraising drive.

Friends of Del Mar Parks is a committee of the Del Mar Foundation, a community fundraising group.

"The community has always had a history of coming together for a project like this. Our dream is that this will be a beautiful park that the community will be proud of," she said.

By agreeing to use private funds for its portion of the purchase price, the City Council dropped earlier plans to build a new City Hall and fire station on the site.



DAN TREVAN / Union-Tribune
Students walked around the quad area during lunch break at the Winston School, which leases property and buildings from the Del Mar Union School District. The last playing fields in Del Mar are on the 5-acre property as well.

The Del Mar Union School District is not required to sell the property to Del Mar, but the site would have to be rezoned from public use to residential or commercial to make it attractive to any potential developer. That is not likely to happen given the strong feelings in the community to preserve the site as is and replace some parking spaces with grass for recreation and picnics.

The actual purchase price is anybody's guess. The average Del Mar home is worth well over \$1 million, and the 360-acre fairgrounds on the north end of town is valued at over \$1 billion.

The City Council began negotiations for the property four years ago under former Mayor Richard Earnest.

“We continue to work hard to get to the price and terms (of the sale),” Crawford said Tuesday.

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