



FWISD Girls' School to Move Downtown

Tarrant County agrees to sell empty building

By Deborah Ferguson

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Downtown Fort Worth will become the new home for the Fort Worth Independent School District's all-girls school, under a deal today approved by Tarrant County Commissioners.

Commissioners voted 3-2 to sell the former Tarrant County Education Center, 401 E. 8th Street, to the FWISD for \$4,450,000. It will allow the Young Women's Leadership Academy now located near the city's medical district to have a larger campus next fall.

"It's a huge deal for our kids. We're outgrowing our facility. Now we're moving downtown, and we have the opportunity to forge new relationships with our community neighbors," said YWLA principal Mia Hall after the vote.

"We have to renovate it. We're ready to go to work on it right now," said FWISD Superintendent Walter Dansby. "We have plans in place right now for a lot of it, so hopefully we'll get the entire building done by the end of the summer."

YWLA opened in August 2010 in a converted building on West Magnolia Avenue. The academy started with sixth and seventh grades with plans to expand to 12th grade. Ninth graders started in the fall, putting 240 students in a tight space.

The district realized early the academy would need more room as it added 75 students a year for a maximum of 525. The county-owned building emerged as the leading choice because of its central location that would expose girls to downtown campuses of Tarrant County College, the University of Texas at Arlington and the new Texas A&M School of Law at Texas Wesleyan University.

Back in January, FWISD trustees approved 8-1 almost \$6 million dollars in renovations from money left over from a 2007 bond program. The deal hinged on whether Tarrant County commissioners would agree to sell the building.

A vote two weeks ago was delayed so commissioners could further review the sale. Commissioner Roy Brooks, whose wife serves on the YWLA's community advisory council, urged approval calling YWLA "a star in the crown of the Fort Worth ISD."

County Judge Glen Whitley also expressed support for the school calling it "one of the greatest schools we could hope for." However, Whitley had concerns that the school's location across the street from the hub of public transportation, the city's Intermodal Transportation Center, would collide with people who are not legally allowed near a school.

He expressed the same support and concern today in casting one of two opposing votes. Commissioner Gary Fickes also voted against the sale.

Dansby understands the security concerns, but says plans are already in place to make the building safe.

Dansby has already had architects in the building working on plans to turn the four-story building into a public school by the start of the 2013-2014 school year.