

# City selling two school buildings

## Developers with sound financial backing sought

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The good news for local charter school operators, who struggle to find suitable facilities: the city of Rochester is selling two recently closed elementary school buildings in the northeast quadrant. The bad news: the request for proposals includes a preference for a taxable development, which makes reuse by a charter school less likely.

The buildings are School 22, on Zimbrich Street off Joseph Avenue, and School 36, near Carter Street and Clifford Avenue. Both served Rochester School District students until June when they were vacated as part of the district's wider capital works plan. Schools that fall out of use automatically revert from the district to the city.

A request for proposals from potential buyers is out now, with an asking price of \$1.5 million for each building. The School

See **BUILDINGS**, Page [13A](#)

### Article Continued Below

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[See BUILDINGS on Page A13](#)

#### Buildings

Continued from Page 3A

22 lot is assessed at \$1,143,400; School 36 is assessed at \$1,000,600.

Charter schools, which have been crammed into spare shuttered churches or forced out of the city altogether because of the space shortage, are the most logical buyers.

The city's request for proposals, though, states: "The city sells real estate with the goal of increasing the tax base. The city therefore gives preference to proposals to transfer property into private ownership for taxable uses."

If such an owner cannot be found, the city would consider selling to a nonprofit, like a school, on the condition it agrees to pay taxes for five years.

The city also prefers "a developer with a good track record and sound financial backing," which also does not necessarily describe most charter schools, particularly new ones or those without the benefit of a wider support network.

Vertus Charter School, for instance, launched in 2014 in a renovated church off Lyell Avenue. As it expands it will need to find more space, but Leigh McGuigan, its co-founder, said the school is not considering either of the city's buildings.

"The requirements to bid were, in our judgment, complicated and expensive," she said. "It struck me their aim was to appeal to real estate developers with for-profit motives."

City spokeswoman Jessica Alaimo confirmed the city's most important criterion is to help with economic development. She declined to say whether the city has received any responses. The bid process closes Sept. 11.

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**School 22 on Zimbrich Street is one of two former school buildings the city is looking to sell. Schools 22 and 36 closed in June.**

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