



## MEMORANDUM

To: Tom Flanagan, Superintendent

From: Joe Weith, Senior Project Manager

Date: September 8, 2021

Re: BHS/BTC Site Search and Evaluation – Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This memorandum provides a summary of our findings related to the BHS/BTC site search and evaluation, and our recommendation to the Burlington School District (“BSD”) for moving forward into the next phase of site analysis and conceptual design. Details of our site evaluations are contained in the report entitled “BHS Site Search and Evaluation – Final Report,” prepared by White + Burke Real Estate Advisors (“W+B”) and dated August 2021.

### Approach

The approach W+B took to conduct the site search and site evaluations included:

- Working with BSD staff, establish site search and evaluation criteria.
- Weight each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important.
- Search for and identify potential sites. Sites were identified based on discussions with BSD staff and School Board members, suggestions made by the public to the District’s website, and W+B’s commercial real estate and development experience and expertise.

- Collect readily available information pertaining to the development feasibility of each identified site (e.g., current use, zoning, natural features, surrounding land use, known environmental contamination, etc.) and score each site based on how well it meets or promotes the site evaluation criteria. A scoring system of 1 to 10 was used with 10 being “excellent” and 1 being “poor”.
- Based on the weight and score of each criterion, produce a total score for each site and a numeric ranking of the potential sites.

It should be noted that the scoring system used to evaluate the prospective sites is not intended to be an “end all be all” determination of which site or sites advance to the next phase of conceptual design and more detailed feasibility analysis. The scoring system is only a tool to help BSD better understand the pros and cons of each prospective site and help guide the District in its decision-making on which site or sites to advance to the next phase.

## Site Search and Evaluation Criteria

W+B worked with BSD Board and staff to establish the following site search and evaluation criteria, and the weighting for each criterion:

<b>Site Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Comments</b>
City / Community Support	5	
Occupancy Schedule	5	Relative amount of time it will take to negotiate land acquisition/legal issues; design, permit and construct; Target open date: September 2024
Expected Site Work / Building Cost	5	
Program Fit on Site	4	BHS (including outdoor green/activity space), BTC, ONTOP and Horizons on the same site
Accessibility - Bus Transit	4	Location on bus line with bus stop nearby; fewer bus transfers preferred
Availability of at least 325 exclusive parking Spaces	4	350 - 400 spaces preferred
Land Acquisition Cost	4	
Zoning / Permitting Risk	4	Potential for permitting issues that could delay timeline or increase cost
Potential Environmental Risk	4	Potential for environmental contamination which could increase time and cost
Location / Central Location in City	3	1/2 of student population lives Old North End to the north; 1/2 lives Old North End to the south
Accessibility - Vehicular	3	Safe and efficient access, minimal traffic congestion; convenient vehicular access important for BTC's out of town students
Accessibility - Walk/Bike	3	Convenient and safe access for bikers and pedestrians
Distance/accessibility to Athletic Fields	3	Level of convenience to get from school to athletic fields - walk, bus, drive
Expansion potential	3	
Nearby Amenities (bike path, walking paths, nature area, shops, park, etc.)	2	
Potential for Partnerships / Shared Resources	2	Opportunities to share physical space with other entities and/or programmatic partnerships with other entities

## Findings

A total of 16 sites were suggested as possibilities. Four of these were eliminated from consideration due to some factor that made them unworkable, such as being too small to accommodate the required facilities. W+B evaluated and scored twelve (12) sites that we felt could potentially accommodate a new high school and technical center. The results of our site scorings are provided below:

<b>Site Rank</b>	<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Total Site Score</b>
1	52 Institute Rd. - South Side	420
2	52 Institute Rd. - North Side	412
3	Leddy Park	409
4	Rock Point	346
5	CP Smith / Schifilliti Park	332
6	Lakeside Ave - Sears Ln	329
7	Macy's - City Place Property	322
8	Gateway Block	319
9	City Place Property	317
10	Elks Property	309
11	Urban Reserve	301
12	Sisters of Mercy	298

## Observations

1. The top three (3) sites in terms of total site score include Institute Road – South Side, Institute Road – North Side, and Leddy Park. There is a sizable gap between the total site scores of the top three (3) sites and the remaining nine (9).
2. The Institute Road sites score the highest primarily for the following reasons:
  - The property is owned by the District, therefore no land acquisition cost.
  - The property is currently/recently used for educational purposes therefore significant City and community support is expected.

- Considering the property's current/recent use for educational purposes, BSD's recent success in obtaining permits to renovate/expand the high school, and the fact it is surrounded primarily by low intensity open space uses (i.e., not dense residential neighborhoods), zoning/permitting risk is low, and a quicker occupancy schedule is expected.
  - The property appears to be large enough to accommodate all programs and surface parking which is significantly less expensive to construct than structured parking.
  - The property is located on a bus line and is relatively well located in relation to the to the student population.
3. The Leddy Park site scores high primarily because the property is large enough to accommodate all programs and lower cost surface parking, the site is flat and undeveloped (i.e., lower construction cost), it is owned by the City (i.e., no land acquisition cost), and is located on a bus line. The site scores lower than the Institute Road sites in terms of community support because there is likely to be some community opposition to converting publicly owned open space to higher intensity high school use. Also, it is unknown whether the City will support transferring a portion of this open space parkland to the District for higher intensity educational use.
4. Reasons why other sites scored lower than the Institute Road sites include, but are not limited to:
- Privately owned parcels will likely have a significant land acquisition cost thereby increasing the expected project cost. Privately owned parcels will also require time to negotiate purchase and sale agreements and other legal issues, which could delay the occupancy schedule.
  - Properties surrounded by or adjacent to dense, residential neighborhoods are likely to face neighborhood opposition which increases zoning/permitting risk and lengthens the occupancy schedule.
  - Downtown sites generally scored lower due to a combination of higher expected project cost (i.e., cost of construction and land acquisition), low City support (i.e., desire for tax revenue), cost and/or inconvenience of providing sufficient parking, and higher probability

of development and permitting challenges (e.g., geotechnical issues, historic preservation issues, etc.).

5. While the overall scores for the three (3) downtown sites were generally lower for the reasons listed above, all three sites scored relatively high for several of the evaluation criteria including overall accessibility (i.e., bus transit, vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle), central location in relation to student population, nearby amenities, and potential for partnerships/shared resources. The differences between the three (3) downtown sites center on expected City support and land acquisition cost. The two (2) sites involving City Place property scored very low in regard to expected City support due to the City's desire to see this prime downtown property privately developed with a high-density mixed-use project (residential and commercial) that generates significant property tax revenues to support City services and pay off tax increment financing bonds. The Gateway Block, on the other hand, scored higher in terms of City support because the site is already predominantly owned by the City and, therefore, the City is more likely to support continued public use. The Gateway Block site also scored higher in regard to land acquisition cost because of the current public ownership and the owner of the two (2) private parcels has expressed interest in partnering with the School District on a redevelopment of this block.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the site evaluation criteria, namely City/community support, overall project cost, and the desire to have a new high school and technical center constructed and open by September 2025 (i.e., occupancy schedule), we recommend BSD advance the Institute Road sites to the next phase of site analysis and conceptual design. We expect there to be strong City and community support for keeping BHS/BTC at Institute Road and, in our opinion, these are the only sites that have a chance of meeting BSD's aggressive occupancy schedule.

We are aware of some vocal support for the high school being in the core of downtown. While we believe any downtown site will be more challenging, costly and time-consuming than the Institute Road sites, if the school board wishes to explore a downtown site in further depth, we recommend focusing on the Gateway Block (for the reasons listed above, namely expected City support). If the school board decides to explore the Gateway Block in further depth, we recommend BSD retain an architect and civil engineer to conduct a preliminary site assessment (e.g., geotechnical, stormwater, access, parking, historic preservation, etc.) and prepare a conceptual site/building design to see if and how a high school/technical center could potentially fit on the site. This

preliminary site assessment and conceptual design will also identify development and/or regulatory issues that could potentially impact the project cost, permitting process and occupancy schedule.