



6th + Harrison Detailed Plan Develop, talent development

Augustine Prep would be located at South 6th Street and West Harrison Avenue.

Proposed south side school promises excellent education, improved community

BY HILARY DICKINSON, staff writer

If all goes according to one local business leader's plans, Milwaukee's south side could have a new \$50 million to \$60 million K-12 school in 2017.

Augustine Prep, a choice or charter school that would ultimately have 2,000 students, is the vision of Gus Ramirez, executive chairman of Waukesha-based HUSCO International Inc.

"We view this as transformational," Ramirez said. "We think our student graduates will transform Milwaukee from the contributions they make. It will be a high quality school in an area that is unattractive. It will change the whole ambience of that community."

Augustine Prep has been percolating in Ramirez's mind for the last three or four years, as he believes Milwaukee is in need of more high quality education.

About 18 months ago, he began looking for property on the south side to purchase, and the Ramirez Family Foundation has now acquired approximately 10 acres—an amount he said is sufficient to build the school. The site is located at South 6th Street and West Harrison Avenue.

"Milwaukee has one of the worst school systems of any major metropolitan area in the nation," Ramirez said. "The inadequacies of K-12 education are a major issue

for the city, state and nation. Throughout the greater Milwaukee area system, there are a fair number of poor performers and not a lot of accountability in Milwaukee public, charter and choice schools, resulting in poor schools very rarely closing down. Consequently, we continue to finance these poor performance schools."

Ramirez believes the south side is in "acute need" of a school like Augustine Prep. He said the growth of the Hispanic community will provide much of the manpower to serve the Milwaukee business and service community, but children in the area need access to more high quality educational alternatives.

Additionally, he said Ronald Wilson Reagan College Preparatory High School at 4965 S. 20th St. has approximately 1,100 students on a waiting list and Carmen Schools of Science & Technology at 1712 S. 32nd St. has approximately 350 to 400 students on a waiting list.

"That results in roughly 1,400 to 1,500 children not being able to access good schools on the south side," Ramirez said. "And the alternative for these children is Bradley Tech High School and South Division High School, which are some of the poorer schools in the district."

The City Plan Commission has unani-

mously recommended approval for the rezoning of the land. The next steps are for it to go before the Public Works Committee on July 8, the Zoning, Neighborhoods & Development Committee on July 14, and the Common Council on July 21.

"The fundamental choice the city has to make is, do they want a beautiful school on a site that's been remediated, or do they want an industrial site that's an environmental and visual blight on the community?" Ramirez said.

Ramirez describes the school as one that would focus on excellence in education, on the athletic field and in the performing arts, while also providing a faith-based education.

"Our expectations include that all graduates will have the grit, values, faith, fitness and academic background to be successful in whatever direction the students decide to take," Ramirez wrote in Augustine Prep's vision and mission statement.

Planned to open in 2017, the school would be constructed in two phases, the first of which would be anchored by the development of a 160,000-square-foot structure that could hold 1,000 children. Initially, however, about 400 students will be enrolled.

The first phase of construction would

also include development of a roughly 25,000-square-foot gymnasium and a full-size outdoor soccer field and track.

The second phase of construction would bring the school to 250,000 square feet and would double its enrollment to 2,000 students by the 2027-'28 school year.

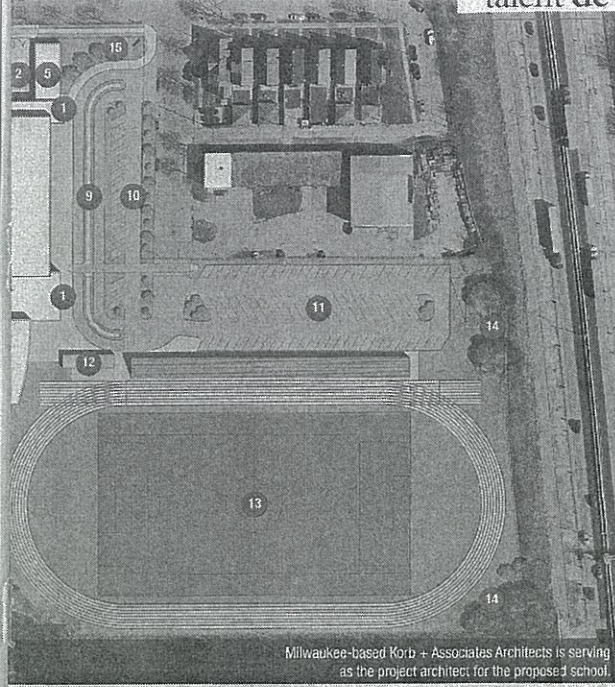
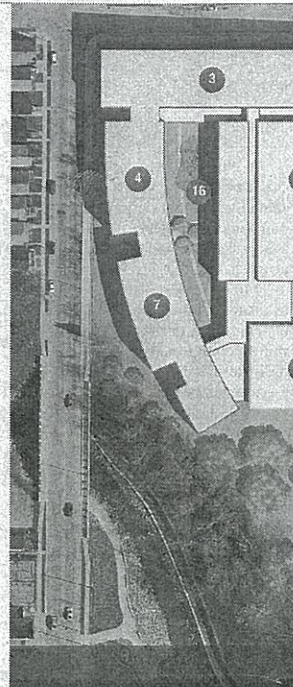
Ramirez expects students to be recruited from schools including the United Community Center, St. Anthony School of Milwaukee, St. Marcus School, Atonement Lutheran School, Milwaukee College Prep, La Causa Charter School, and other high quality K-8 schools.

"But the primary focus is to have this be a neighborhood school and for the demographic to reflect the neighborhood," Ramirez said.

If more students apply than there is space available, he said a lottery system will be used.

The Ramirez Family Foundation plans to complete additional land purchases by the third quarter of this year and for the facility to be designed by the second quarter of 2016.

The total investment in the school is \$50 to \$60 million. The foundation plans to contribute up to 75 percent of the total, and the rest will come from fundraising. Students would be responsible for some



Milwaukee-based Korb + Associates Architects is serving as the project architect for the proposed school.

talent development

SITE PLAN KEY

- 1. Building entrance/lobby
- 2. Service entrance
- 3. Primary school - four stories
- 4. High school - four stories
- 5. Admin - one story
- 6. Gymnasium
- 7. High school addition
- 8. Natatorium
- 9. Pick up/drop off lane
- 10. Visitor parking
- 11. Faculty parking
- 12. Athletic outbuilding
- 13. Athletic field
- 14. Green space/stormwater management
- 15. Monument sign
- 16. Playground

borhood kids will be in a secondary position to the school's students.

Some have also raised the issue of whether the school will take away students from Milwaukee Public Schools.

Ramirez believes that the impact will be minor, especially at first since Augustine Prep is starting with 400 students. Many of those students, he added, will be young children going to school for the first time. It will also not be until 2022 or so that Ramirez said the school will reach the capacity of 1,000 students.

Even then, he said the competition will be a good thing.

"What we hope the school does is build the quality of all schools around it that will want to compete with it for students,"

Ramirez said. "If I can't fill capacity, it's a victory because other schools will have gained. We want every school to be great."

Milwaukee Public Schools media manager Tony Tagliavia said, "As the school is at the conceptual stage at this point, we do not have a comment."

If the plans for the proposed school do not receive the necessary upcoming approvals, Ramirez said there is another way the school could still be built.

He said about five to six acres of the land has already been approved for zoning, and he recently applied for a special use permit that would allow the school to be built on that. After that, Ramirez said the plan would be to get the remainder of the land rezoned. ■

activity fees, but they will not be charged tuition, Ramirez said.

Ramirez expects the school will ultimately employ approximately 70 teachers, all of whom will be aggressively recruited in Milwaukee and nationally. He said he will seek teachers who have bachelor's and master's degrees and who have at least three to five years of experience.

He is, however, willing to consider Teach For America alumni and working professionals such as engineers who are qualified to teach math.

Ramirez said a blended teaching approach will be used, combining "excellent classroom instruction" with extensive technology to provide for personalized learning. The school year would also be at least 200 days, which is 20 days longer than most schools.

The non-denominational, Christian faith-based element of the school will be incorporated into many areas of education, but Ramirez said the school will attempt to attract a diverse student body as part of its evangelical mission. He is also exploring using the gym for church services on Sundays.

Besides the high quality of education, Ramirez asserts Augustine Prep will carry several other ancillary benefits such as

improving the housing stock, attracting small businesses to the area, and pressuring "unsavory bars" to leave.

Despite all the positive aspects of the school that Ramirez cites, Augustine Prep has been met with some opposition.

For instance, Alderman Tony Zielinski is in opposition to the school because he would like to see the property become a soccer facility for public use. He formed a task force about a decade ago to develop one on the south side and ultimately selected that location.

"We've got a lot of youth on the near south side who love soccer," Zielinski said. "Probably the highest concentration of people and kids who play soccer is in the Walker's Point, near south side area, and there's no soccer facility."

Zielinski went on to say that the area has other schools, like the Bruce-Guadalupe Community School and the St. Anthony School.

Ramirez said the school's gym, soccer field and track would be free and open to the public when not being used by the school.

Zielinski, however, said the school's field will be a lot smaller than the one he would have proposed; it will be used for other sports, thereby significantly reducing the space for soccer; and the neigh-

THE C-SUITE STARTS WITH CHARACTER.

Invest today in your company's future leaders with a nationally ranked, AACSB-accredited MBA from Marquette University. Our program develops ethical global leaders capable of managing change in dynamic environments at every level, leaders with character prepared to take your company to the next level.

marquette.edu/gsm

