



The former Malcolm X Academy on Center and Palmer Streets is back in the news.

## Malcolm (X) in the middle

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Last Friday, Milwaukee Public Schools issued a statement saying that it had parted ways with the developer of a project to renovate and re-develop the former Malcolm X Academy/Center Street School, at Center and Palmer Streets, noting that the plan would nevertheless continue to move forward.

"The district will continue to work on the construction of the project and will issue a Request for Proposals for a construction manager," the statement said. MPS spokesman Tony Tagliavia told me that the plan still includes opening an International Baccalaureate middle school in the complex.

Yesterday, in a [news report \(http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/mps-splits-with-malcolm-x-developer-but-still-owes-fees-b99356741z1-276412281.html\)](http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/mps-splits-with-malcolm-x-developer-but-still-owes-fees-b99356741z1-276412281.html), a district official was quoted as saying MPS ended the deal with the development team after a member of the latter made a "questionable request," though apparently that same news outlet -- which also ran a [pro-voucher school editorial \(http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/mps-fiasco-over-malcolm-x-academy-continues-b99357548z1-276849861.html\)](http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/mps-fiasco-over-malcolm-x-academy-continues-b99357548z1-276849861.html) yesterday -- didn't ask about, or at least didn't report on, what that request might have been.

On a related side note, the local media continues to ignore the fact that a number of [school buildings \(http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/portal/server.pt/comm/schools/315/schools\\_list/43847\)](http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/portal/server.pt/comm/schools/315/schools_list/43847) that were recently vacant have been sold, among them Jackie Robinson, Dover and Centro Del Nino. An RFP was issued for [the sale \(http://onmilwaukee.com/myOMC/authors/bobbytanzilo/garfieldrfp.html\)](http://onmilwaukee.com/myOMC/authors/bobbytanzilo/garfieldrfp.html) of the former Garfield Avenue School yesterday, after a previous prospective buyer failed to get financing.

Many more such buildings have recently been called back into service by the district -- 27th Street School, Green Bay Avenue, Howard Avenue, Sarah Scott, Milwaukee Education Center, Fritsche Middle School, Happy Hill, Morse Middle School, Webster Middle School, Burroughs Middle School, Westside Academy II

building, 38th Street School (in some cases to house charter schools) among them. There's been talk, too, of re-opening Fletcher on the far northwest, and/or 88th Street on the far southwest sides.

Changing needs and changing demographics mean that the district is smart to hold on to buildings that could be of future use. What would taxpayers -- and Milwaukee media -- say if MPS sold a building and then five years later needed to build a school down the block from it?

How would those folks suggest the district grow and replicate high-performing schools like Golda Meir (<http://onmilwaukee.com/family/articles/goldahigh.html>) (which expanded into the previously empty MEC, for example) and the Montessoris (<http://onmilwaukee.com/myOMC/authors/bobbytanzilo/montessoribustour.html>) (which expanded into the former, and briefly vacant, Tippecanoe), a number of which are already facing crises of space that prevent the district from growing enrollment?

Had it asked about the so-called "questionable request," the paper would've learned that on May 23, MPS and Mayor Tom Barrett sent a letter to local businesses seeking sponsors for the annual Council of Great City Schools conference (<http://www.cgcs.org/FallConference>), to be hosted in Milwaukee by MPS in October. One of the recipients of that letter was Dennis Klein of KBS Construction, part of 2760 Holdings LLC, which was the Malcolm X developer.

A handwritten note in response (<http://onmilwaukee.com/assets/201409231855.pdf>), which appeared to have been penned by Klein, to MPS' Ann Terrell said, "I will sponsor at Michigan level (\$15,000) when I get LOI (letter of intent) and/or lease extended on Malcolm X. This is a *contingent* (emphasis in the original note) pledge."

"It was not deemed to be illegal as far as we know," MPS' Chief of Staff Erbert Johnson told Fox 6 News (<http://fox6now.com/2014/09/23/developer-dumped-but-what-lies-ahead-for-empty-school-building/>). "We basically again turned it over to our attorney, which is the city attorney — and from there we decided to sever the relationship."

Ending that relationship apparently didn't sit well with two suburban politicians who previously tried to force MPS to hand over public buildings to voucher schools (<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2013/related/proposals/sb318>), because yesterday afternoon, Milwaukee Board of School Directors President Dr. Michael Bonds fired a missive at Republican State Sen. Alberta Darling and State Rep. Joe Sanfelippo.

"From the beginning of this process, Sen. Darling and Rep. Sanfelippo have clearly misunderstood this effort to bring a high-performing International Baccalaureate school to the Malcolm X neighborhood. Their statement today only further serves to illustrate that fact," Bonds is quoted in an MPS news release.

"There is nothing inappropriate about the decision made by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors to move forward with this project without the developer we initially identified. What was most critical to this Board is that the project move forward.

"It is unfortunate that Sen. Darling and Rep. Sanfelippo have characterized this effort as phony, crooked and obscene. In fact, the Board took the appropriate steps to continue the project itself and keep our promise to the neighborhood to deliver what it asked for: a high-performing school."



Bonds also said he has asked the city attorney's office about "legal options with respect to the inflammatory and false allegations by Darling and Sanfelippo against the district, alleging corruption."