

City seeks formalized plan from Regents on Braille School

Editor's Note: In the printing process, some pages in Monday's *Vinton Eagle* were inserted incorrectly for the press run. This error left out the jumped portion of Faith Ann Brown's article on the City Council discussion of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School. That story is printed in its entirety here.

**By Faith Ann Brown
Correspondent**

VINTON – With no new information regarding the transfer of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School grounds (IBSSS), Chris Ward, Vinton city administrator, asked permission of the Vinton council to make an inquiry to the Iowa Board of Regents.

“At this time the City of Vinton has not received a formalized proposal from the Iowa Board of Regents on the sale of IBSSS,” Ward wrote in a memo to the council before last Thursday night's meeting. “Up to this point it has only been the staff of the Iowa Board of Regents that has contacted the City of Vinton to begin discussions.

“At first it was the sale of the entire property for the price of a \$1.00. It has changed to a lease with an intention to purchase the property on July 1, 2017. Officially there has not been anything in the minutes or in any record from the Iowa Board of Regents themselves about the sale of the property,” the memo continued.

Ward explained that if the City plans to begin exploring the idea of purchasing the property then a formalized request would need to come from the Regents on the matter and not simply from its staff. “This would be a policy decision by the State of Iowa to do this, a roll call vote (not simply a consent vote) on the intentions of the Iowa Board of Regents would be needed to begin discussions of the property,” he stated.

Ward added that a formal proposal would allow the city to begin financially planning for not only a proposed purchase of the property but also for any upkeep of the property. An early proposal outlined the extensive repairing/refurbishing that would need to be done at the school.

Mayor John Watson told council members that he had been approached by members of the organization ‘Save Our School’ (SOS) which had formed when proposal for turning the school and campus into a low security prison was first talked about back in the ‘80s.

“This group is asking that the city holds off on taking that step while they do some research of their own,” Watson explained.

Nathan Hesson, council member, questioned the reason for Ward delaying his request to the Board of Regents. “I don't see how Chris making any kind of request to the Regents would interfere with what this

group is doing,” he said.

Ward explained that he was asking for permission to submit to the Iowa Board of Regents something asking for a formalized proposal. In order to be on the agenda for the Regents' meeting in October, the request would need to be made before Aug. 22.

With questions still in the air about the Regents' part in the discussion, State Rep. Dawn Pettengill explained that she and State Rep. Bobby Kaufmann had submitted a letter to the Board of Regents.

The letter asked for copies of any email and written correspondence regarding the school covering the areas of a possible sale of the grounds, feasibility studies of possible uses as well as correspondence of renting or leasing a portion of the grounds.

Pettengill explained that under the Open Records Law the request could be made to see what ideas or plans the Regents have discussed about the property.

“I don't think it's fair to our citizens to be upset about this,” Pettengill told council members. She told council members that her written request asked for the release of records to go back five years.

A motion by Brian Parr to allow Ward to submit a request to the Iowa Board of Regents for a formalized proposal regarding the sale of the IBSSS was approved.