

ACE from A1

charter school must reside, ACE finally settled on the old Harrison building.

Besides being more than big enough to house its student population, the property checks many of the boxes on the school's list of needs.

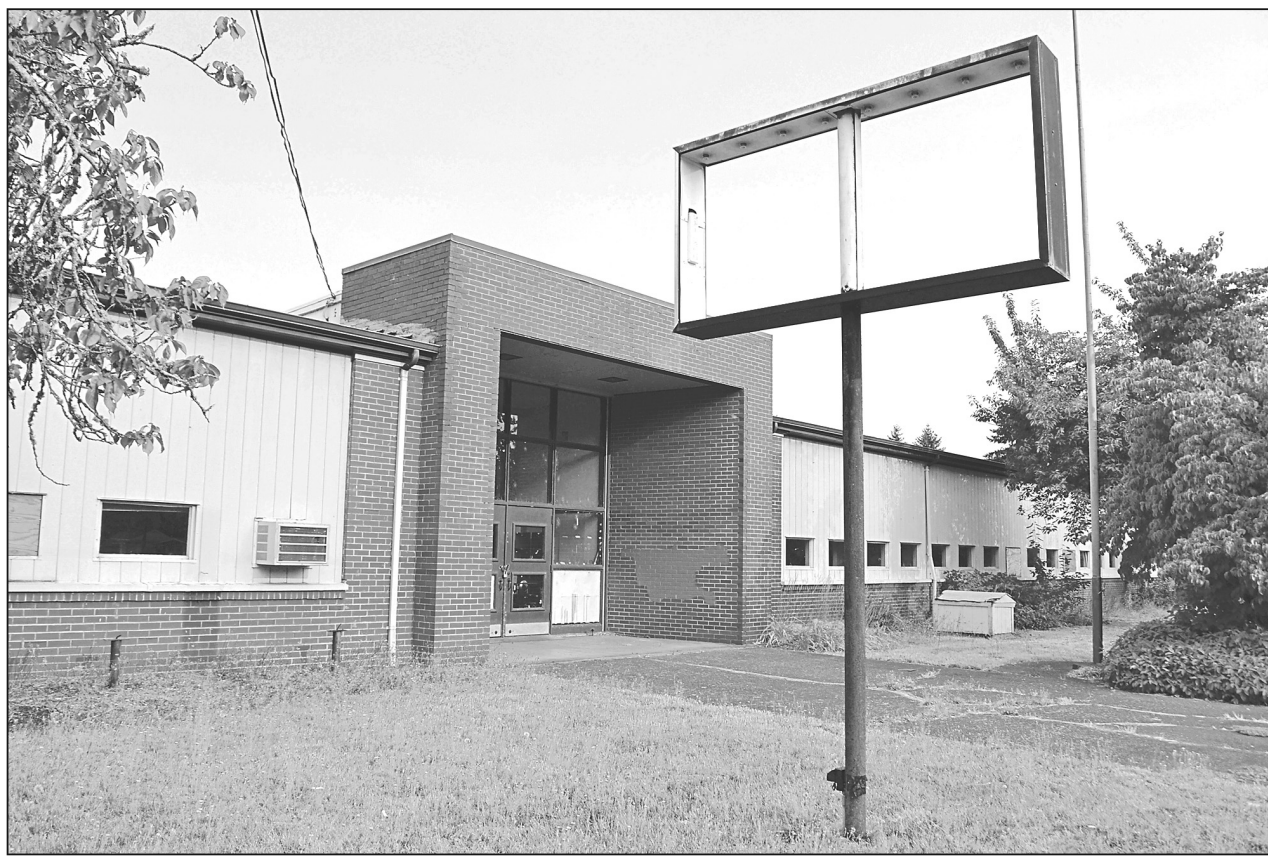
"We would like a library. That's always been something that has been on our wish list. And we currently have no playground," Sahnou said. "We're just looking to condense our multiple buildings into one and of course provide the extras for our students like a computer room, an arts and crafts room, a music room – things that we just don't have the space for right now."

Plans submitted to the Cottage Grove Planning Commission show that ACE will occupy the southern half of the old Harrison school building, which includes the gym, several classrooms and the library.

However, some renovations are needed. The conditional use permit will cover two phases of various improvements including safety features.

"Because of limited funding, we're not able to get in and do the whole building at once," said Sahnou. "So that's not ideal, but we're going to make it work."

Under the two-phase plan, improvements will be made to address fire safety issues by adding a fire alarm, meeting fire exiting requirements and installing a building-wide fire



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The old Harrison Elementary School last saw students in its halls in 2018.

sprinkler system. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards will also be brought into compliance in bathrooms and damaged doors and windows will need to be fixed.

Impact on the neighboring community is expected to be light as students will only be on-site two or three days out of the week.

"That's a big thing that community needs to know — is that our school is a smaller school," said Sahnou. "We also don't have buses, which is a huge thing. I think the neighborhood really needs to understand we are working on making the drop off smooth in the morning

— as well as pick up in the afternoon — and not planning on-street parking."

To avoid on-street parking, the school has proposed a 44-space parking lot on the south side of the building.

Sahnou stressed, too, that ACE intends on partnering with the community should it purchase the property.

"We've already talked to South Valley Athletics and want to partner with them for the use of the field," she said. "So, I really am hoping that we can share it with the community."

**Harrison's History**

While finding a building that will consolidate

students and materials all while serving ACE's needs is good news for the school, Harrison's own history with the community adds a wrinkle to the story. The question of what to do with the old elementary school property has been a recurring point of somewhat turbulent public discussion over the past several years.

In 2016, SLSD proposed and passed bond measure 20-240, which asked the community for nearly \$36 million to realize plans to replace, renovate and upgrade school facilities. The general obligation bond included the relocation of Harrison Elementary School to its current site on

Taylor Avenue, renovation of the aquatic center, several deferred maintenance projects and district-wide network and technology upgrades.

The measure also proposed salvaging and reusing the old Harrison property rather than addressing its many renovation needs, which would have proven to be prohibitively expensive.

The district made the case for this approach in a 2016 list of concerns about the old building's maintenance and renovation needs.

For instance, the document stated that "the combination of aged clay bricks and failing mortar are of great concern in the event of any seismic event."

Based on a collapse potential risk index created by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, SLSD reported that the building was in the "high potential category."

Other concerns listed included high-cost estimates to deal with roofing conditions, ADA compliance, water piping corrosion and

rust, HVAC maintenance accessibility and heat insulation issues.

In addition, the challenge of abating the asbestos which was in proximity to a number of these issues made the costs "astronomical."

The list of concerns did not, however, specifically list asbestos as a health concern. The growing population of the school, rather, necessitated many of these costly upgrades as approximately 450 students attended the school before the relocation.

To avoid the high cost of renovation and asbestos abatement, the 2016 bond proposed using \$513,455 to salvage Harrison's gym and field space for community recreational use.

The bond passed that year with 56 percent of voters casting in favor.

However, in the fall of 2018, the SLSD board began looking at the costs associated with the 6.84-acre property more deeply. As bond projects were implemented and price estimates shifted, the district gradually realized it needed to adjust its plans regarding the fate of the property. Three options were developed.

The first option included a full renovation package: a parking area, athletic field, asbestos abatement, some demolition and the rebuilding of the gym.

Though initial costs were estimated by the school district to be around \$900 thousand for the whole endeavor, the discovery of additional structural issues shot the cost of maintaining the gym alone up to around \$1 million. Including the other items on the price list, final estimates on the first option came to more than \$2 million — more than double what was initially expected.

A second option, which excluded salvaging the gym, dropped those costs to between \$800 and \$900 thousand — still not an en-


see **SCHOOL** on A10



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