

Community News

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Odyssey Charter School officially purchases portion of Barley Mill Plaza

Original owner Stolz LLC still controls two-thirds of the property

Representatives from the Odyssey Charter School in Wilmington officially signed off on the purchase of a portion of Barley Mill Plaza, where they plan to develop a master campus.

Serving as council, Larry Tarabicos, of Tarabicos Grosso, LLP, closed on the acquisition of approximately 36 acres located in Greenville area plaza on Feb. 18.

Tarabicos said that the acquisition and redevelopment of the new school campus was financed through the issuance of \$34.65 million in bonds by the Delaware Economic Development Authority, the largest such bond offering for a Delaware charter school.

The school officially signed a 15-month lease agreement for Building 20 last May for its K-4 students, with the ultimate goal to purchase, renovate or redevelop a total of eight buildings within the complex.

The school currently serves 933 students, split between a lower school for students in grades kindergarten through fourth, and a middle school serving grades fifth through seventh.

Grades eight through 12 will be added in successive years until the school is able to reach its ultimate goal of becoming a full K-12 school by the 2019-20 academic year.

New Castle County Councilmember Bob Weiner, 2nd District, said that following a careful review of Odyssey's plans for the site, he concluded that the repurposing of the back third of the property by the school is a "perfect fit" with the surrounding community.

"Of course, additional details need to be scrutinized, including the traffic, berms, buffers, and public access to the publically financed Odyssey sports fields and walking paths remains open during non-school hours," he said.

He added that after seven years of "tortuous challenges" to the Greenville community, it was refreshing to finally find that good fit.

Last spring, the Delaware Supreme Court unanimously upheld an April 2013 decision by Chancery Court Judge Sam Glasscock III, rendering a rezoning of a 37-acre portion of the development invalid after a vote on the rezoning from Weiner was considered "arbitrary and capricious."

Bala Cynwyd, Pa.-based developers Stoltz, under Barley Mill LLC, originally hoped to build a mixed-use center with roughly 450,000 square feet of retail space in the Greenville region just outside Wilmington.

Stoltz still controls roughly two-thirds of the property, Weiner said.

"It remains to be seen what will happen with the front 55 acres," Weiner said. "Maybe the organization is waiting for a change of administration, and retirement of this council. However, as long as I remain in office I will continue to champion our community's quality of life."

Tarabicos said the most exciting thing is that Odyssey continues to demonstrate high levels of performance among its student base, which he said is built using a "pure lottery system" that doesn't recruit or only accept cream-of-the-crop students.

"There's just a limit to what we can do without adequate facilities," Tarabicos said. "This will transform the school considerably."

He added that he is unaware of any other K-12 charter school in the state, and that the decision to develop Odyssey is a major event in Delaware education.

A search of statewide charter schools listed with the decharternetwork.org website supports Tarabicos' claim of no other K-12 charter schools in the state.

"It's a testament to their board and administration and what they've accomplished," he said.

The proposed 261,000-square foot proposed campus is expected to eventually support roughly 1,700 students when the K-12 program is fully in place.



PHOTO/ COURTESY PHOTO

A rendering of what the new proposed campus and buildings for the Odyssey Charter School at Barley Mill Plaza could look like. The school officially closed on a deal to purchase 36 acres of the property to develop their master campus, making it the first K-12 charter school in the state.

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