



YorkCounts charter school picks NW Triangle site

If approved, the York Academy Regional Charter School would move into the Smyser-Royer building.

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Founders of the proposed York Academy Regional Charter School are eyeing a property in the city's Northwest Triangle.

The school's committee has selected the Smyser-Royer building in the urban renewal effort for the site of the school. The former foundry building is being renovated by Kinsley Construction.

"It's a really great location for a school," said Kevin Schreiber, the city's economic development director and Redevelopment Authority coordinator. "It really looks the part."

The addition of a school would be a big step forward for the Northwest Triangle project, Schreiber said. This would be the second tenant for the historic Smyser-Royer building.

The Northwest Triangle project aims to redevelop the neighborhood around North George Street, West Philadelphia Street and the Codorus Creek. A mix of commercial- and

residential-use buildings are planned for the area.

The charter school founders, who are part of a YorkCounts committee, hope to open the school in the fall of 2011. The project still needs approval. The school's leaders have not signed a lease agreement for the site, said Dennis Baughman, co-chairman of the charter school committee and a former superintendent at two York County school districts.

There's been a lot of advancement in the school plan in the last few months. York Suburban and Central York school boards have said they support the charter school proposal. York City School Board is still mulling the endeavor.

All districts named in the charter school application are required to hold public hearings and to vote on the school after a formal proposal is submitted in November. Even if any school districts say no, the charter school board can appeal to the state for approval.

If the charter school moves forward in its planning, a lease agreement would be signed, and Kinsley Construction would renovate the interior of the building to suit the needs of the school, said Robert Kinsley, founder, chairman and CEO of Kinsley Construction.

"This is a fairly recent development," Kinsley said.

Since the building would be leased by a school, rather than owned by a school, it would remain

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on the tax rolls, Schreiber said.

The idea was generated by a YorkCounts committee but will eventually be taken over by a separate nonprofit. The goal of the school is to break up concentrated poverty in the city schools by attracting students from outside the city boundaries.

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What's next

The York Academy Regional Charter School is preparing a detailed application that it will submit to schools.

The application will be given to host schools in November.

In than application, officials from the charter school need to specify a school location -- along with other details such as curriculum and financing details -- in the application that's to be presented to school districts by Nov. 13.

About the building

The Smyser-Royer building was home to an iron foundry in the 1800s.

Iron produced there was used to build the Brooklyn Bridge, lampposts on Ben Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia and fences in New Orleans, Schreiber said.

"This building is one of those hidden historical gems," he said.

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