

Residents block school purchase

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

At least one more act remains to be written in the Valley Woods drama, with the title alternating between "School for Sale" and "School Is Sold."

The board of directors of Yeshivath Beth Yehuda Schools voted Wednesday: not to accept the recommendation of its steering committee to buy the vacant Valley Woods Elementary School from the Birmingham school board.

That leaves the board still faced with disposing of the former elementary school which was closed two

years ago because of declining enrollment.

Beth Yehuda board's negative vote resulted from concern raised in the school community over an article in the Eccentric April 21, according to Harold Josephs, Josephs is chairman of the Beth Yehuda site committee.

A comment by Ray Agren of the Valley Woods Homeowners Association at the April 19 board of education meeting caused the concern, Josephs said.

AGREN ASKED the board to postpone its decision to accept the Beth Yehuda purchase offer until its May 3

meeting so that he could get the association's reaction to the offer.

Agren made the comment, "We are the people concerned; we live next door to that school."

Josephs said Thursday, "Some feelings of a lack of acceptance in Beverly Hills... were apparently reinforced by some statements in the newspaper."

Board members construed Agren's remark as "a little less than friendly," Josephs said.

"There was considerable concern in our community about putting our girls in a hostile environment," he added. The Beth Yehuda girls school was to be housed at Valley Woods.

having the Beth Yehuda girls' school there and a number of positive comments in support of it.

"I GUESS it would be impossible to find any use that would please everyone," he added.

Peckenpaugh said he believes the next step will have to be "to offer some reassurances to the congregation, but they would need to come from the (Valley Woods) community more than from the school district."

Peckenpaugh said he had contacted Josephs last week and asked "if it would be profitable to sit down and discuss the matter." Josephs indicated such a meeting might occur sometime this week, Peckenpaugh said.

"I have extended the invitation and I think we might talk later," he added. "It is a possibility that is open."

Craig Mercier of Proctor Homer Warren Inc., who is handling the sale of the school for the board of education, said Friday his next move is "to find a new buyer."

HE SAID he would "hate to speculate on whether the board would reconsider a purchase offer made by the Lutheran High School Association of Greater Detroit."

"I wouldn't try to second guess that board," Mercier added. He said he was working on a "couple angles, but nothing I can talk about at this moment." Mercier said he expected the Beth Yehuda board meeting Wednesday "to be a formality."

Future talks are far off

Any further talks between representatives of the Birmingham School District and the Yeshivath Beth Yehuda Corp. for the sale of the former Valley Woods Elementary School are still days or weeks away.

The action signalled the collapse of the last of a number of efforts to dispose of the building by the Birmingham Board of Education. The school is located in Beverly Hills.

The reason cited for the negative vote was a feeling of a "lack of acceptance" in Beverly Hills.

Peckenpaugh said last week that further talks might be arranged this week with representatives of the Beth Yehuda Schools but after contacting Mercier Tuesday he said, "Emotions are still too warm. Seven to 10 days more may be needed before we have a chance for a meeting."

In the meantime, Mercier indicated he is "contacting all possible people in his continuing search for a buyer for the building, Peckenpaugh added.

"It is too early," Birmingham Supt. Donald Peckenpaugh reported Tuesday after conferring with Craig Mercier, realtor with Proctor Homer Warren Inc. The firm is attempting to find a buyer for the school which was closed in June 1975 because of declining enrollment.

The Yeshivath Beth Yehuda Corp. last week turned down the recommendation of its steering committee that it purchase the vacant building for its girls' school.

Thursday, May 12, 1977

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