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**ONEIDA SCHOOL DISTRICT #351
195 S. 300 E.
MALAD, ID 83252**

January 22, 2020

Information Regarding the Old High School

Dear Parents, Faculty, and Community Members,

The Old High School has been abandoned for 40 years. At the time it was abandoned, it was deemed unsafe for student occupancy. Since that time, it has not been used for students, but as a storage area for the district. We are required by law to keep all areas free from recognized hazards. Recognized hazards are those that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees, students, and others. The State School Safety inspector has written up the Old High School for multiple years, citing hazardous conditions. Some of these conditions include:

- Extensive interior water damage
- Weakened Floors
- Exposed asbestos
- Broken windows
- Falling capstones
- The plumbing has also been shut off for quite some time.

Several months ago, the School District commissioned a study to evaluate the conditions of the current Elementary School. While on campus, the engineering team assessed the potential of leaving

the Old Gym as a stand-alone building. They could see that the Old Gym is not a free-standing structure but attached to the Old High School. The engineering team's general feeling was that to leave the Old Gym standing, there would need to be extensive stabilization and reinforcement of the building, as well as of the South wall. Hazards were found in the Old Gym that would need attention to make it a stand-alone building. The hazards discovered are:

- Roof repair
- Spongy gym floor
- Electrical issues
- Plumbing issues

No estimate of cost was given for extensive stabilization, reinforcement, and fixing the risks mentioned above. These are concerns that have to be taken into consideration, especially since the Old Gym continues to be used.

Recently the School Board decided to move forward with demolition of the Old High School and the Old Gym. To move forward with the demolition of both buildings, the asbestos must be removed. According to Eric Traynor of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), asbestos removal to prepare any building for public use is much more expensive and extensive than removing asbestos in preparation for demolition. We know the cost of removing the asbestos from the Old High School to prepare for demolition. That cost may be more than \$200,000 (Eric Traynor, DEQ). Some in the community have felt that renovation rather than demolition would be possible. The School Board sought expert advice and felt that renovation would not and is not a viable option. Consider the following statement from Jared Lusk, CEO of Construction Specialists:

“When working on old buildings, the costs are really driven by the State requiring you to meet today's codes. That is why the cost for renovating is so high. You can't just fix what's broken and make subpar items better. The State usually requires you to make an old building meet a new buildings standards. This drives

costs through the roof, and at the end of the day, you still have an old building. You can't treat a school building like a house and make upgrades at will. Public buildings are under much more scrutiny when it comes to upgrades and renovations.”

Recently, an individual in the community approached the School Board asking for the Board to give or sell (for a small purchase price), the lot containing the Old High School and Old Gym. Thus, saving the School District demolition costs. After consideration of the offer, the School Board felt there were several reasons that selling or giving the property would be a poor decision. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- Continued safety hazards that the building has been cited for by the State Building Inspector.
- Under new ownership, the School Board and School District lose control over when the building would be “remodeled” or when the current safety issues would be addressed.
- It would remain an “attractive nuisance” for our students and the community.
- The Board would not have ownership and would not have any say who occupies the building. This introduces safety concerns for our students, such as sex offenders, drug users, and more traffic in the vicinity of the current Elementary School.
- Shared ownership of the block would significantly decrease flexibility on the use of the remaining property, including parking, traffic flow, and future development plans.
- The owners would have future veto powers over the rest of the block.

These are some of the many reasons the School Board decided to move forward with demolition. With the proximity of the Old High School and Old Gym to the current Elementary School, selling the property to someone poses too many concerns. It raises too many questions that cannot be answered.

Another primary concern of the School Board is what happens with Pioneer Park and Harding Field (the field behind the Elementary School). If a new Elementary School was to be built on the existing block, and the lot containing the Old High School and the Old Gym was not available for building, the new Elementary School would have to be placed on the upper part of the block. This placement destroys Pioneer Park and Harding Field. Destroying these two heritage centers and “green space” areas within the community are not something the School Board wants to do. These spaces are vital to the community, and the School Board is trying to help protect them and their continued use. We know that demolition is expensive. This is the primary reason the building is still standing. The cost estimate for demolition given a year ago was \$500,000. Over the years, the School District has set aside some funding from the Plant Facilities and Supplemental Levies, which will cover the higher amount of the cost. The balance can be taken from our Lottery Fund allocation. As stated above, asbestos must be removed before demolition. It is projected that to remove the asbestos, the cost will exceed \$200,000 (Source: Eric Traynor, DEQ). We are working with the DEQ to secure a grant that will help us with approximately half of that cost. We will have to go out for a bid for the demolition portion of this project.

Several factors will determine the demolition timeline. The asbestos removal, the availability of demolition companies, and the prep work necessary on the boiler system all need to be done before demolition. We have hope that all of this might be able to be completed within the next 12-month period.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Kent
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Oneida School District #351