

## Frequently Asked Questions Land Acquisition at 935 N. Cassady Avenue Updated 12/12/2024

We hope the following information will provide more information and understanding about Bexley Schools' acquisition of land on North Cassady Avenue to develop an athletic complex and potential outdoor learning opportunities for our students.

Anyone wishing to ask questions or provide comments can do so through our [Facilities Planning Community Feedback Form](#), which is always available on the district's website Home page.

### New Information

#### **NEW - What was done during the due diligence period?**

Bexley Schools hired the local civil engineering firm EMH&T to conduct comprehensive due diligence studies of the Cassady property. We also met with multiple representatives from the Ohio EPA to better understand certain Ohio EPA documents and EMH&T's related findings pertaining to the Cassady property and its neighboring industrial property. Additionally, Bexley Schools coordinated all of this due diligence with legal counsel specializing in the various areas of inquiry we pursued.

To summarize, these due diligence actions included:

1. Conversations with Ohio EPA officials;
2. Engagement with EMH&T (engineers, surveyors, planners, and scientists) to complete a survey of the property, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, a Preliminary Investigation for Waters of the United States, a preliminary analysis of the stormwater management plan, and site due diligence relating to future land and zoning entitlements, infrastructure, and environmental issues;
3. Conducting preliminary zoning conversations with the City of Columbus;
4. Having initial conversations with neighbors regarding existing easements;
5. Conducting a title search of the property; and
6. Drafting of preliminary drawings to determine how site plans can be utilized at the property.

Based on this extensive due diligence and associated input from our various experts at every step of the process, the district concluded that the Cassady property is feasible and safe for the district's intended use.

#### **NEW - When will the purchase be finalized?**

The purchase was completed on Dec. 12, 2024.

**NEW - How will Bexley Schools keep the property secure after the purchase is complete?**

New temporary fencing will be installed as quickly as practicable to secure the large existing building on the site. We also have held discussions with the City of Bexley about the potential of Bexley Police support for the complex.

**NEW - What will happen to the large, existing building on the site?**

We intend to demolish the building after conducting appropriate asbestos abatement. We consulted with others who are part of our facilities planning work and considered possibilities that the building could allow. Ultimately, we think the best possible and most economical use of the property is to start from a clean slate.

**NEW - What will be included at the complex?**

Nothing has been formally designed or decided, but our architects have provided us with options regarding fields and venues that the site could accommodate. We will confer with our athletic director, coaches, student-athletes, and athletic board to gather more specific information about their needs and ideas for the complex. We will also continue to seek input from families and the community. Similar to our facilities-planning work with our buildings, we will consider all of the feedback to develop possible options for the complex.

**NEW - What is the timeline to create the complex?**

There currently is no known timeline for the development of the land, but we know that this new venue will not be ready for our students' use for a while. Grass practice fields may be available for athletic use before the complex is fully developed.

**NEW - Will the Cassady project be included in the district's Facilities Plan?**

Yes. We believe the long-term benefit of this opportunity is transformational for Bexley Schools. This decision fulfills the goal of our community-driven Strategic Plan, which charged us to: "Explore alternative facilities and buildings through partnerships, grants, leases, and purchasing opportunities." ([Strategic Plan Facilities Goal 2.2](#); p. 10.) The Strategic Plan identified facilities as an area of focus, and the Facilities Subcommittee studied the needs of our student-athletes, as well as the state of some of our athletic facilities. Even though the opportunity for this project arose as we were partly through our facilities-planning work, we are committed to recommending an updated Facilities Plan to the Board of Education that includes this new complex.

**NEW - How will the complex be funded?**

Fully developing the Cassady Avenue land will require the community's support for funding. Any potential funding requests will be presented to Bexley voters for approval. We also are considering a private donation campaign to help ease residents' tax burden.

## Purpose & Timing

### **UPDATED - Why is new land needed?**

Bexley School facilities have an average age of 84, with one school building over 100 years old. Our facilities have served us well for decades due to the district's dedication to maintenance and upkeep. However, we believe that it is not good stewardship to continue on a path of spending to simply maintain our buildings. During our Strategic Plan development, our residents expressed a strong desire to upgrade and possibly expand our academic facilities and improve our athletic venues. The Strategic Plan specifically charged the district with finding new land for purchase or lease.

For many years, we have recognized that we do not have enough space for our student-athletes and team sports. And we have heard this from our community. Too often, teams must switch back and forth between early and late practices to give everyone equal access to field space, causing many of our students to arrive home late in the evening after practice. At least one coach has told us that practices are occasionally canceled, depending upon the logistics of working around other teams using the same venues. Another coach shared that a rain delay can completely derail a practice – the team can't wait out the rain and continue practice because they have to cede the athletic site to the team practicing after them. Parents and students also have expressed concerns that this demanding schedule can negatively impact students' social and emotional well-being or even their physical well-being.

The purchase of the property will allow us to expand our academic buildings on the Cassingham Complex by utilizing land currently used by athletics, as well as permit us to address playing fields and other outdoor activity concerns and opportunities. Our current facilities-planning work is a reflection of our community and its support to upgrade our buildings and athletic facilities. Looking toward the next 100 years, we believe upgrading and possibly expanding our academic facilities and improving our athletic amenities will positively impact our students for decades to come.

### **UPDATED - Why are the schools buying land?**

We had an urgency to act on the purchase when the land was available for sale due to the rarity of this amount of space and its proximity to the district. Because of the district's foresight in saving Permanent Improvement (PI) funds approved by voters in 2016, the board is able to purchase the land without requesting additional funds from voters to do so.

### **UPDATED - Why is this important to do now?**

We believe the long-term benefit of this opportunity is transformational for Bexley Schools. This decision fulfills the goal of our community-driven Strategic Plan, which charged us to: "Explore alternative facilities and buildings through partnerships, grants, leases, and purchasing opportunities." ([Strategic Plan Facilities Goal 2.2](#); p. 10.) The Strategic Plan identified facilities as an area of focus and the Facilities Subcommittee

studied the needs of our student-athletes, as well as the state of some of our athletic facilities.

We have worked hard to develop local partnerships and lease agreements, talked with local leaders and developers, and considered the possibility of every land option identified, including land owned by Capital University, the current Africentric High School site, and others.

The district has partnered with the Jewish Community Center (JCC), and we appreciate its leaders' willingness to help the district find land solutions in the past. The school district has considered long-term leases for practice or event fields with the JCC, Capital University, and St. Catharine's Church, as well as with Columbus Parks and Recreation for land in the Clowson Field area. We hope to continue our partnerships until the new complex is fully developed.

With this opportunity, we concluded that our district would be best served by owning the land on which it would develop rather than spending millions of dollars to develop venues on property we do not own. The purchase now permits us to achieve facilities improvement goals within our current planning process.

## Project Details & Process

### **UPDATED - What is Bexley Schools doing on Cassady Avenue?**

In mid-September, Bexley Schools announced a purchase agreement to acquire 28.36 acres of land north of Bexley, at 935 N. Cassady Ave., to develop an outdoor campus for potential outdoor learning and multiple field sports. This land is more than double what the district currently has on the Cassingham Complex. A 75-day due diligence period for the proposed purchase of the Cassady Avenue property expired on Dec. 2. The district had the right to terminate the purchase agreement on or before that date but elected not to do so. The district is scheduled to complete the purchase in mid-December.

### **Why was this not discussed publicly until the agreement was signed?**

Like most agreements between buyers and sellers, confidentiality is paramount, and it has helped us avoid a potential bidding war with another interested party. The board received regular updates while we worked to secure a purchase agreement.

### **Why are the schools not purchasing land in Bexley?**

Bexley School officials have searched for years for suitable land within Bexley city limits that is large enough to meet our needs and support our many field sports and practice spaces. No space in Bexley city limits is suitable in size or type and affordable for the district. Additionally, we were cognizant that any potential land purchase in the city would detract from our tax base because the schools are tax-exempt.

**UPDATED - What sports or activities are anticipated for the outdoor complex?**

No final decisions have been made regarding the scope of the new outdoor campus, though some sports venues are expected to be moved to the new site.

Similar to how we have conducted our Strategic Planning and Facilities Planning processes in the last two years, we will begin planning for this site by seeking input from our families, faculty, student-athletes, coaches, staff, and the Bexley community in early 2025. Watch for communication regarding how to participate.

Nothing has been formally designed or decided regarding what will be available on the complex, and it's possible that the land will be developed in phases. Our architects, though, have shared what fields or venues will fit. Under consideration are fields for baseball and softball, a regulation-sized track, a practice field that could accommodate our multiple-field sports, and tennis courts. Outdoor classrooms and other educational opportunities also will be considered.

Generally, Bexley's future sports complex could be similar to the athletic complex owned by the Columbus Schools for Girls (CSG), which is further north on Cassady Avenue, not far from our land.

It's important to remember that this isn't just about athletics. By freeing up land on the Cassingham Complex, we will have multiple options to fix our undersized and outdated classrooms, as well as provide modern learning experiences for all of our students. On the contrary, without such a venue that the Cassady land will offer, our options to address the needs of our three schools at the Cassingham Complex would be very few and limited.

**UPDATED - How have the schools managed the lack of athletic space all of these years?**

The creation of a second campus dedicated to athletics will address our severe deficiencies in field space in serving our nearly 800 middle and high school athletes. We are excited by the prospect of our athletes not having to practice on ungraded fields that also serve as a dog park. Some of our playing venues are in other areas near Bexley, including baseball, which is played at Columbus Parks & Rec's Clowson Field. Some of our sports teams play and practice at Wolfe Park, which is managed by Columbus Parks and Rec. We appreciate the strong partnerships our schools have had with other organizations that have hosted Bexley sports or helped us hold events. We would not have been able to have the number of teams or quality of sports without their partnerships.

**UPDATED - What about the athletic stadium? Would it move?**

No. It has already been decided that the athletic stadium will remain at the Cassingham Complex and we will continue to play many athletic contests at Carlton Smith Field. Specifically, varsity sports contests for football, soccer, field hockey, and lacrosse will

likely remain at the stadium practices for these sports could take place at the new complex.

**How will students get to the new complex? Will transportation be provided?**

We currently provide a shuttle service for student-athletes to the JCC during Spring sports. Similar transportation options to the new complex will likely be available after school. We anticipate this need and are studying our options.

**If sports venues move from the Cassingham Complex, what will happen to the land that is vacated?**

When we began our Facilities Planning work earlier this year, it became clear that many of the most supported options for long-term facility improvements would involve moving some athletic facilities off of the Cassingham Complex. Freeing up land on the Cassingham Complex would give the school district numerous options to upgrade and even expand some of our academic facilities, benefiting all of our learners.

## Funding & Financing

**UPDATED - How will the land be paid for?**

The land purchase will not be paid for with operating funds, though future maintenance of the land and other operating needs will be paid for by the school district's operating funds.

The school district has half of the cash required to purchase the land through savings of proceeds of the 2016 Permanent Improvement (PI) levy, and expects that it will be able to obtain the other half by an issuance of a tax anticipation note (TAN) using those same future revenues of PI. The school board authorized the issuance of these notes on Oct. 9, 2024, in the amount of \$3.5 million, which would leave some remaining PI funds for immediate needs. The amount of future revenues dedicated to debt payments is only 50% of the yearly revenues (\$350,000) from the PI levy.

It's important to understand that operating funds cannot pay for land development and, likewise, permanent improvement (PI) funds are not to be used for day-to-day operations. PI funds have restricted purposes in that they can only be used for capital expenditures that have a useful life of 5 years or longer.

The [Treasurer's page on the website](#) provides more information about PI revenues and the limitations on what they can and cannot fund.

**UPDATED - Is the cost of this land a good deal for the schools?**

The agreement calls for the schools to pay \$6.03 million for the 28.36-acre parcel of land.

The seller received the land in a private sale for \$2.25 million in March 2024, while the Franklin County Auditor's 2023 appraised value is \$10.18 million. Finding this much land this close to Bexley, and at this price, was not something we could ignore.

**Do the schools have the money to develop the Cassady Avenue land?**

Developing the Cassady Avenue land for outdoor learning and sports venues will likely be included in a future funding request related to our Facilities Plan, which is expected to be considered by the board of education in the spring of 2025. Funding also could include private donations.

## Safety & Due Diligence

**UPDATED - Will there be improvements to this section of North Cassady Avenue?**

The City of Columbus, in cooperation with the City of Bexley, has [plans](#) to reconstruct North Cassady Avenue from the railroad tracks north to Seventh Avenue. The property at 935 N. Cassady is within this improvement corridor. Planned improvements include adding a three-lane road section, major intersection improvements, and demolition of the apartments and abandoned gas station at North Cassady and Fifth Avenues. The City of Columbus' plans also include adding a bikeway, sidewalks, landscaped tree lawns, and new street lighting. Future phases involve extending these improvements to Johnstown Road.

**How will safety and security be handled for the new complex?**

The safety of our students is the district's top priority. As we move forward with potentially developing the Cassady Avenue land, we will continue to evaluate this issue, including by using the district's own safety and security resources to assess the site's safety needs. We also plan to confer with outside entities about recommended safety and security measures, including Columbus School for Girls, which has successfully operated an athletic sports complex for years further north on North Cassady Avenue. We also have held discussions with the City of Bexley about the potential of Bexley Police support for the complex.

**UPDATED - How will you be sure the land is environmentally safe for our students and community?**

During the due-diligence period provided for in the purchase contract, the district hired experts to conduct site inspections and review environmental reports and studies on the site in detail. The following are issues we addressed:

- Completed property surveys
- Held conversations centered around environmental safety with Ohio EPA officials
- Contracted with civil engineers (EMH&T) to complete a Phase I report.

Based on our due-diligence work and findings, we have concluded that this site is safe for the district's intended use.

**What information has the Ohio EPA shared with Bexley Schools?**

The Ohio EPA's Division of Air Pollution Control provided a summary to Bexley Schools of the emissions of the Calgon Carbon Corporation that sits next to the proposed complex land. According to the OEPA, Calgon Carbon's "actual emissions have been significantly lower than the maximum permitted." The OEPA summary lists the pollutants created by the facility, and includes a chart showing the emission limits permitted compared to the amount emitted by Calgon Carbon; the chart indicates that all of the emissions are well under the permitted levels. The OEPA summary also provides QR codes to access Calgon Carbon's reports and air permits.

> [Ohio EPA Calgon Carbon Summary for Bexley Schools document](#)