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Property deals bring smiles to Seattle School District

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By [Keith Ervin](#)

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While the Seattle **School** District's pending sale of the former **Colman** Elementary **School** draws controversy, two other property deals have **school** officials smiling.

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Despite the sluggish economy, the district's former headquarters on Lower Queen Anne Hill and a North End property both drew multiple offers and deals priced higher than the appraised values.

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The district sorely needs the \$7.3 million the two sales will generate. The district borrowed \$14 million from capital funds last fall to help plug a \$22 million budget deficit.

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And the committee that oversees the district's Building Excellence program told the **School** Board on Wednesday that the six-year building program may end up with a \$4 million deficit. Although final numbers won't be known for some months, oversight-committee Chairman Jim Jenkins said revenues will be approximately \$380.2 million and expenses about \$384.3 million.

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Because costs were driven up by an earthquake that caused significant damage at West Seattle High **School** and a fire that leveled Coe Elementary **School** during construction, Jenkins said the 1 percent cost overrun was "as close to the budget as possible."

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SRM Development of Spokane has agreed to buy the former district headquarters on Fourth Avenue North near Seattle Center for \$5 million. The **School** Board was told the company plans to demolish the two-story **school** structure and build a nursing home.

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The other property, the district's North End Annex at 13720 Roosevelt Way N.E., will be sold to the Martin Partnership for \$2.3 million. Its appraised value was \$1.55 million. District officials expect the parcel to be used to distribute hardware supplies. The appraised value of the other property was not immediately available from the district.

The district put the two facilities up for sale during construction of a new headquarters, the \$54 million John Stanford Center, south of Safeco Field.

The district has sold its former logistics center on Fourth Avenue South to Costco for \$12 million (with \$500,000 temporarily withheld to cover any possible hazardous-material cleanup).

A sale is pending on the district's former computer offices on Fourth Avenue North across from the old headquarters.

The **School** Board appears to be on track, meanwhile, to approve a deal next week to sell the former **Colman school** to the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle for \$804,000.

The sale received strong support from prominent African-American community leaders at a board meeting Wednesday, but drew strong criticism from supporters of a separate African American Heritage **Museum** and Cultural Center.

The Urban League's plans call for a black-history **museum** along with offices and apartments. But activists who occupied the building in the 1980s and early 1990s want the entire building devoted to a **museum** and cultural center.

Some other citizens have questioned the **Colman** sale price, which was reduced from \$1.2 million after the Urban League said it would cost more than originally thought to clean up hazardous materials in the building.

The Urban League plans to spend a total of \$15 million to \$16 million on the project.

In his November 2000 appraisal, Bruce Allen said the district had rejected his recommendation that he study the possible commercial value of the 93-year-old, three-story structure as well as the land.

District facilities chief John Vacchiery, associate general counsel Ron English and acting financial director Steve Nielsen said they did not know the details behind the district's rejection of Allen's suggestion that he review an earlier determination that the building had no value.

However, Vacchiery and Nielsen said the brick structure doesn't have commercial value. "I'm surprised it survived the last earthquake," Nielsen said.

Allen's 2000 appraisal of the **Colman** property was based on the value of the land, which he estimated to be \$1.7 million, then subtracted an estimated \$500,000 for removal of asbestos and demolition of the building.

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The Urban League recently asked for a price break, presenting a \$747,000 bid for asbestos removal and demolition. District staff members found the bid credible, Nielsen said. Allen reduced his appraisal to \$950,000.

The district lowered the price as much as state law allows, and then credited the Urban League \$60,000 when it agreed to assume all legal liabilities and costs in connection with lawsuits by African-American Heritage **Museum** advocates who claim the district has a prior obligation to sell the **school** to them.

The district spent \$25,000 defending those legal challenges last year.

School Board member Mary Bass on Wednesday questioned the sale of the property to the Urban League and the adequacy of the price.

But board members Jan Kumasaka and Barbara Schaad-Lamphere said they were satisfied with the deal. Schaad-Lamphere said the district has had a commitment for years to support an African-American **museum**.

"That building is about to fall down around our ears. We should be happy that someone is paying us to take it, particularly when we got more than the appraised price on the other properties we heard about today," Schaad-Lamphere said.

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