

# NEWS RELEASE

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### **Eugene 4J partners with community agencies to envision a community multicultural, arts and science education center in vacant EWEB riverfront property**

Emerging from several years of pandemic disruption the Eugene School District 4J sets sights on a bright future for the students, families and community it serves. With a new superintendent at the helm, the district is proposing the next chapter in its history; preparing a submission to the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) declaring its intentions to bid on the vacated riverfront property and freeing up space for expansion in instructional programs such as career development and applied learning at the N. Monroe Street location.

The district seeks to purchase the riverfront building with plans to work with Lane Arts Council, and the Eugene Science Center, among other community partners, to honor the history of the site and steward it into the future for generations to come. The resulting cooperation would establish a multicultural center that celebrates learning, innovation, and creativity at a key riverfront location that respects Eugene's past, present and future and returns the N. Monroe Street property to instructional space as currently zoned and originally designed.

With authorization from the Eugene 4J school board, Superintendent Andy Dey has indicated to EWEB GM Frank Lawson that the district is preparing a letter of interest to purchase the property. Should the EWEB Board of Directors agree that the highest and best use for this asset is to keep it in the public land bank, the district will provide publicly accessible programming and use in collaboration with non-profit and community partners. Existing kitchen facilities will be used as a community food hall that would incubate budding restaurant concepts and provide for hospitality and culinary arts programming for students seeking to enter into that profession. Additionally, the district will relocate its administrative functions to the site.

"The community and educational uses are endless," shared Eugene School Board Member, Alicia Hays. "Co-locating, arts, science, education and the opportunity to enhance community access to what otherwise might be a bureaucratic office building seems to be the perfect expansion to the riverfront master plan. I'm excited about the possibilities as we imagine a new chapter for the school district and the students we serve."

Additionally, the district would prepare a permanent home at the waterfront space, for multicultural programming such as the NATIVES program that has been operating at a location on Bailey Hill. "The historical significance of this unique riverfront site is compelling," says Dr. Dey, 4J superintendent, "providing our NATIVES, and other multicultural programs, with a space steeped with cultural importance is exciting. To be able to host programming and events designed to share that rich history with our students, families and the broader community is one of the strong appeals of this project."

The district is also committed to expanding child care programs in the community. Through existing relationships with early learning providers, the district would work to provide access to quality child care and pre-school opportunities for students, staff and community. Such early learning opportunities have demonstrated benefits to student success as they enter the K-12 educational system.

4J and its community partners will finalize a proposal within the week to submit to the EWEB board at an upcoming meeting.

Background:

The district's administrative functions currently operate at the 200 North Monroe site, which is intended for educational use, as it is zoned for public education facilities. Never designed to be the seat for the administrative functions of the 6<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the state, there are efficiencies lost in a building intended for learning not business offices.

Enter the EWEB property at 500 E 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a unique fit to fill the operational needs of the district while freeing up much needed educational space for program expansions at the North Monroe location. The riverfront site would require little modifications to consolidate and streamline district operations – with much more possibility.

During the late fall of 2018, EWEB declared the property as surplus. In 2021, the City of Eugene irrevocably waived its right to exclusively engage EWEB in the purchase of the property which prompted the utility board to solicit requests for proposals (RFP). Finding no viable options that met the requirements outlined, the utility's governing body authorized the general manager to engage in negotiations for the sale of the real estate.

Following the closure of the initial RFP process, the Eugene School Board held an executive session to discuss the location and the many uses for community arts, science and multicultural activities, providing the superintendent the authorization to pursue the property acquisition.

While the parameters of the offer are confidential pending review and acceptance by the utility district, the school district will not be utilizing any general obligation bond funds or those designated through recent state investments outlined in the Student Success Act. Funds for the purchase of the property would come from previous real property sales and other district resources.

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