

Board OK's land sublease for new school

\$30.8 million middle school would be ready in late 2018

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Tuscaloosa City Schools took a step forward with an upcoming middle school north of the river by agreeing to sublease 36 acres of land from the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority.



Michelle Lepianka Carter / Tuscaloosa News

On Tuesday, the Tuscaloosa City Board of Education approved a resolution to sublease the property from PARA in order to build a new middle school that will be part of the Northridge High School feeder system. Construction is scheduled to begin at the end of December near Northridge High and finish by December 2018.

In 2012, Gov. Robert Bentley made a deal with the Alabama Department of Mental Health, PARA and Ol' Colony Golf Complex for the property, which was last valued at \$3.6 million.

In February, the Tuscaloosa City Council passed a resolution that designated the board, as well as PARA, as a sublessee of the property.

Board attorney Dave Ryan said that through the agreement, the board would lease the land from PARA, which leases it from the Alabama Department of Mental Health. The lease would run until 2039 with an option for a 20-year extension into 2059, then taking another 20-year extension to 2079.

"The good news is what rent there, and it's not much, is paid by PARA and the city schools has a use agreement with PARA that says whenever we are not using our recreation or athletic facilities, they have the right to use them," Ryan said. "That's how the city schools compensate PARA for its part of the lease."

The agreement also includes an option for the school system to purchase the land between 2059 and 2079 if it wants.

"The school board can go before the Department of Mental Health, buy that property, and we'll appraise it and say we will or won't buy," Ryan said. "Until then, it's your property for free."

The estimated cost of the new, unnamed school is approximately \$30.8 million and would accommodate nearly 900 students, making it the largest middle school in the school system. The new school is part of the system's strategic plan.

Following the approval of the resolution, the board went into executive session for students hearings.

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