

U Prep gives up on move to suburb

Residents fought charter school; new site chosen

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University Preparatory Charter School for Young Men, an all-boys charter school in Rochester, is abandoning its plan to move to a property on East Ridge Road in Irondequoit and instead is focusing on a former charter school building on the city's west side.

School CEO Walter Larkin Jr. informed the board of trustees of the decision in December, according to recently published meeting minutes. It puts an end to a contentious and drawn-out battle between the school and Irondequoit residents who opposed its relocation there.

U Prep is located in a 39,000-square-foot space on Lake Road. The East Ridge Road site is a 65,000-square-foot commercial property that is mostly vacant. The school settled on that site for a potential move and expansion after searching fruitlessly within city limits, Larkin said.

'We're taken aback': Response to thinly veiled racist accusations

Residents in Irondequoit immediately raised objections. Some were based on traffic flow and other logistical concerns; others were thinly veiled racist accusations about "vastly increased crime" that would follow the school, whose student body is almost entirely Black and brown.

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University Preparatory Charter School for Young Men on Lake Avenue in Rochester.

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U Prep

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“Saying ‘it’s going to cause property values to go down; there’s going to be safety (issues); there’s going to be gun violence.’ ... We’re taken aback,” Larkin said in July 2023.

The move became entangled in a procedural web in the town of Irondequoit. School leaders appeared repeatedly before both the planning and zoning boards; they also required sign-off from State University of New York Charter Schools Institute.

In the meantime, another possibility arose. Urban Choice Charter School lost its state charter and was forced to vacate its building at 1020 Maple St., south of Jay Street. That building has been home to a number of charter schools over the last 15 years.

Another choice for U Prep site

Larkin and U Prep board chairman Ed

Yansen did not respond to requests for comment about the change of plans, but the meeting minutes show they have turned their attention to the Maple Street building.

That building is owned by a holding company affiliated with National Heritage Academies, a for-profit charter school organization in Michigan that tried unsuccessfully to open a school in Rochester in 2016.

William Farrell, president of the homeowner’s association for the housing development across the street from the East Ridge Road site, said he was relieved to hear the proposal was off the table.

He insisted again that his group’s opposition was based on practical considerations, not any characteristics of the school itself.

“Our group, the people in our group – we were always about the noise and the traffic and all that stuff,” he said. “We felt the town, right from the very beginning, had made mistakes. ... We’re hoping the next buyer is some commercial entity.”