

# Old library to house SSRC

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Scenic Regional Library's former Union branch is expected to replace a 105-year-old building for the Union R-XI School District.

The building that now houses the district's Student Services Resource Center (SSRC) needs work, which would likely cost more than buying and improving the old library, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Mike Mabe told members of the Board of Education at their May 18 meeting. The building, located near Union Middle School at 503 West End Ave., was once Union High School.

The building houses programs like special education administration.

"Those programs that are in there, we value very much," Mabe said. "But our commitment to the SSRC's future — we have a responsibility to maintain

and upkeep all of our facilities."

The \$950,000 sale of the old 10,800-square-foot library is expected to close in early June. Superintendent Dr. Scott Hayes said Union R-XI, going into the purchase, had \$1.4 million in federal Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund money remaining, giving it money on top of the building cost to allow for renovations to make it fit the district's needs.

"This is not district taxpayer dollars, this is COVID money we are using to purchase this facility," Mabe said.

The district worked with Navigate Building Solutions on a cost analysis to determine what upgrades would be needed to the current SSRC building to keep programs there for the next decade or longer, Mabe said. "We have some definite needs in there, but, before we could touch the

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## New school building

A "sold" sign sits outside the former Scenic Regional Library Union Branch Monday. The Union R-XI School District is buying the building, with plans to convert the structure to its new Student Services Resource Center, replacing the 1917 building that was once Union High School.

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interior, we need to be responsible with the exterior."

The costs just to tuckpoint brickwork and replace windows in the 1917 building would be \$725,000, Mabe said. "That's with nothing on the inside," he said. "And then the second we go inside, all the codes that we've been, kind of, grandfathered in for, those are out the window."

The former library, located at 308 Hawthorne Drive, was built in 1991. It was found to be structurally and technologically sound and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Mabe said.

Another advantage of the former library is it is single story, meaning it is not required to have ADA upgrades like elevators, Hayes said.

Buying an existing building also made more sense than building new. Mabe said the cost of building Prairie

Dell Elementary School, which opened less than two years ago, would now be \$400 a square foot, compared to \$240 when it was built.

"The purchase of the new building, we're getting at \$89 a square foot," he said. "We can't touch that — that is just an unrealistic number for any type of new construction."

That number increased to around \$125 if the district spends between \$300,000 and \$400,000 on renovations to the former library, Mabe said.

Alternative education students are the only students expected to use the SSRC regularly when it moves to the former library. Hayes said the presence of 40 to 45 kids creates a need for more restrooms to be built.

Some of the alternative program students attend for a half day, while others will be there a full day.

Student lunches will be brought in prepared

from Central Elementary School, located six-tenths of a mile away, across Highway 50.

The old library also will house the district's special education team, though students in special education will not be based there. Hayes said it also will have district social workers, at-risk counselors, psychological examiners and the district's lead nurse.

The building will have a small kitchen of its own to allow for employees to prepare meals they bring.

Hayes expects to start work on the old library in October, and the district is considering rebranding the SSRC name for the new location.

He said no plans have been made for the current SSRC building.

"The bottom line is we would have spent more money trying to maintain a 100-year-old building," board President Dr. Virgil Weideman said.