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(File) The Quakertown school board decided in April 2011 to close the Haycock Elementary school

**Haycock officials want Haycock Elementary School back from Quakertown**

By Gary Weckselblatt, staff writer

Haycock Township would like to retake ownership of the former Haycock Elementary School from the Quakertown Community School District.

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The plan would be to use the school as a combination fire company and community center, said Kathleen Babb, chairwoman of Haycock supervisors.

"We are definitely interested in having it given back to us," she said.

However, the township, with a \$1 million budget for a population of approximately 2,300 people, doesn't want to pay for the building and 12-acre property. The school was built in the early 1950s by the Haycock School Board, and taken over by Quakertown when the districts merged a few years later.

"It was built by Haycock Township taxpayers," Babb said. "It would be very unfair to want to sell it back to us."

The school board hasn't declared its final plans for Haycock, though it does intend to dispose of it. The building has rotting pipes and problems with HVAC, the roof, septic, plumbing, and windows made of single pane glass.

School directors closed Haycock in June 2011, and it's been leased to the Bucks County Intermediate Unit since 2015 for \$75,000 annually. The IU, with the district's help, has found other sites for its two Upper Bucks programs and will relocate this week.

The building cost the district \$48,000 to operate a year ago. It needs an additional \$215,000 in repairs. A study by Schrader Group Architecture estimates it would cost \$4.3 million to bring the school up to code.

"We're not going to put any more money into it," said Stephen Ripper, a school director and chairman of the district's Facilities Committee.

Ripper, who lives across the street from the school property, located on Old Bethlehem Road, doesn't believe it makes financial sense for the township to acquire.

"It's going to cost an exorbitant amount of money to repair," he said.

School board member Chuck Shermer called the school "a liability." He said he would be in favor of transferring it back to the township for \$1.

Another option being considered is to raze the building, which might cost \$100,000, and try to sell the property.

Babb said the building's main use would be for the fire company, which has no room to expand and has limited parking. For its monthly fundraiser, a breakfast, volunteers must move vehicles out of the firehouse for room to set up tables and chairs. They then cook and serve customers, clean and remove the tables and chairs and move the trucks back into the facility.

The school "would give us adequate seating," she said. It would also add parking as a voting location, and could be used by the historical society and boy and girl scout troops.

"It could be a community building," Babb said. "It's centrally located in the township. We're very interested in having it back, but we're not in a position to pay to get it."

The township could use parts of the building and not be "under the gun to get renovations done immediately," she said. "We could do it piecemeal. The biggest priority would be to make it usable for the fire company."

The IU has used Haycock for its W.O.W. (We're Outstanding Workers) students. The life skills program helps students 18 to 21 transition from school to the workforce.

There are also 60 students in its early childhood services program, which includes speech, occupational and physical therapy and play groups.

The W.O.W. students are relocating to Strayer Middle School while the younger kids are moving to the Quakertown Community Christian Preschool, according to Rebecca Roberts-Malamis, the IU's assistant executive director.

"Obviously this was not planned," she said. "We appreciate the partnership we have with Quakertown. Unfortunately, with the boiler and the heat situation we're just not able to do that. Student safety and comfort is our number one concern."

She said the IU will continue to look at space as it's "not ideal" to have 18- to 21-year-olds in the middle school. "But for right now, as a temporary solution, we're very grateful."

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