

11/28/12 | 1016 views

## No Decatur high school on Wallace Center site

Lawmaker: State agency wants property on US 31

By Deangelo McDaniel  
The Decatur Daily

A state agency likely will eliminate any notion that the 100-acre Wallace Developmental Center property on U.S. 31 might become the site of a new high school in Decatur.

State Sen. Arthur Orr said Tuesday that he is "90 percent certain" a state agency will buy the property from the Alabama Department of Mental Health sometime early next year.

Orr would not name the agency, but ADMH public information officer Jeff Shackelford said the Alabama National Guard has inquired about the land. Shackelford said that was all he could confirm.

Guard headquarters in Montgomery did not return calls seeking comment.

After spending millions to renovate the Beltline Armory about two years ago, the guard closed 13 armories as part of a cost-cutting measure designed to save \$7.2 million annually.

The Cold War-era buildings in Moulton and Hartselle were returned to the Alabama Armory Commission, and those units transferred to the Decatur location.

Except for a year when Decatur City Schools used the property, the Wallace Center site and its buildings have been vacant since November 2003.

Because Decatur has a limited number of large tracts of land available, the property had been mentioned in the community as a possible location for a new high school — if the school system goes that direction.

Decatur Superintendent of Education Ed Nichols said neither he nor the board has attempted to acquire the property.

“We’ve had no contact with the state about this site and have not looked anywhere else for a high school site,” the superintendent said.

The school system is awaiting results of a facilities study due early next week, and comments from the community after the study, before deciding whether to pursue a combined high school.

Private negotiations are ongoing between ADMH and another state agency about the site that appraised for a little more than \$5 million five years ago. Since the appraisal, the sewer system has collapsed and buildings have been vandalized.

Orr said he has been working to get the Wallace Center site “back up to full level.” He added that replacing the sewer system will cost about \$1 million.

He estimated the site’s current value at between \$2 million and \$3 million.