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School pleased with Norwegian Bay land

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Officials from the Green Lake School District and Conference Center have signed an agreement to donate a parcel of property to the school. The approximate eight acres are located on the west side of the Conference Center grounds. The gift includes woods, wetlands and waterfront on Norwegian Bay. Although this parcel will be deeded to the school for environmental studies by Sept. 1, the Conference Center can continue to use it into the future. In fact, the Conference Center will lease back a couple acres of campground within that area for \$1 annually for 10 years.

School district and Conference Center leaders signed a 15-plus-page document last week, outlining the terms of the approximate eight-acre gift. This gift, however, is located within the Green Lake School District boundary, and will take a substantial amount off the local property tax roll. The Green Lake Conference Center expects to save \$15,000 to \$20,000 in annual property taxes because of the deal, according to President Ken Giacoletto.

Green Lake School leaders approached the Conference Center leadership in January after negotiations stalled for property in the Estates of Lawsonia. To settle the dispute, the Conference Center agreed to donate land to the school on the opposite side of the grounds. As part of the agreement, the school will drop the idea of pursuing land within the Estates of Lawsonia. In addition to the estimated eight acres the school will own, the school will have access to the historic Tea House for classroom use, but the Conference Center will keep ownership. The school also will have access to nearby prairie and wooded areas still owned by the Conference Center. What's more, the school will have full access to 22.7 acres of natural land owned by the Green Lake Sanitary District — adjacent to the school's parcel. These 22.7 acres include additional wetlands and waterfront, purchased in December by the Sanitary District for \$100,000 and open to the public. The Sanitary District is pursuing grant money to offset the cost.

Lindenwood Development had planned to build about 16 homes across those 22.7 acres, but that project has been put permanently on hiatus, along with other Lindenwood homes once planned for the west side of the Conference Center grounds. School District Administrator Ken Bates called the school's eight-acre gift a "win-win," adding the school and Conference Center are considering the best route to provide access.

"It fits better for students," he said, noting the contiguous land will be better than having disjointed land in a subdivision. "Yes, we spent money on legal fees, but in any real estate transaction, some things are cleaner than others, and some things are more complicated," Bates added.

The school is applying for a grant this week with the Earth Partnership for Schools Program through the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. This would help train staff and community members about the value of restoring habitat and learning the history of the property, while using environmentally sound practices, Bates said.