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New charter school could see home at Eclipse Center complex

By HILLARY GAVAN & AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff Writers
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Demolition is underway at the former Kohl's portion of the former Beloit Mall (now the Eclipse Center). The space is being considered as a possible site for a new charter school.

By CLINT WOLF News Editor

BELOIT—Kids First Beloit is eyeing a location near the former Kohl's building for the Lincoln Academy charter school.

The former Kohl's building in the Eclipse Center is currently undergoing demolition work. The proposed school plan will go before to the city plan commission on May 6 and the Beloit City Council on May 18.

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A conditional use permit has been requested to allow school use in a C-3 or community commercial zoning district. The building is proposed to be a free-standing building not attached to the Eclipse Center, similar to Associated Bank, according to information from City of Beloit Director of Planning and Building Services Drew Pennington and Director of Strategic Communications Sarah Millard.

“Kids First Beloit has been working closely with Hendricks Commercial Properties to determine a possible site location for The Lincoln Academy if the proposed charter school application is approved by the UW Office of Educational Opportunity. We believe the Eclipse Center campus would be an ideal site. It is in close proximity to the Merrill and Hackett neighborhoods, on a bus route, close to the public library and other community-based services. Given timelines associated with the project, we have submitted plans to the city requesting approval to proceed with a school project if authorization is received,” said Director of the Hendricks Family Foundation and Secretary of Kids First Beloit Lisa Furseth.

The University of Wisconsin System Office of Educational Opportunity approved phase one of an application for a new charter school in Beloit on Nov 13. Kids First Beloit submitted phase 2 of the application on Feb. 20. Kids First Beloit has undergone an interview process with the review team from University of Wisconsin System Office of Educational Opportunity, submitted supplemental materials and are awaiting a final decision, Furseth said.

The Lincoln Academy is slated to open in the fall of 2021. The charter school is planned to be a public school—not a private choice, or voucher, school. The school’s focus is to be on workforce readiness with accompanying internship and job exploration opportunities.

Although charter schools may be authorized through their local school districts, the one proposed by Kids First Beloit has applied to be authorized through the University of Wisconsin System. If authorized as an independent charter, the school would receive state aid per student in the amount of \$8,619.

Application documents obtained from the University of Wisconsin Office of Educational Opportunity through an open records request detailing the academic plans and goals for the Lincoln Academy as well as funding information, indicated the Hendricks Family Foundation committed to be the lead funder for the Beloit 200 campaign to support Kids First Beloit and the Lincoln Academy. The Lincoln Academy will require a total of \$6,117,000 over five years beyond projected state and federal funding.

Austin Montgomery