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City wants more respect from Fargo

By Helmut Schmidt
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Fargo needs to treat the West Fargo School District with respect, honesty and openness when it develops land, School Board members said Monday.

If that doesn't happen, tax increment financing districts could be met with lawsuits and legislative action - to "get Fargo's attention."

Board members were given a recap of last week's decision by Fargo to start a TIF district to develop a section of land bordered by Interstate 94, Interstate 29, 45th Street and 32nd Avenue South.

West Fargo district officials say the district is unneeded. They're also suspicious that Fargo's approval of the plan is part of a strategy "to TIF the hell" out of them "to get their attention" and force them to give up or share tax authority in the West Acres area.

"The city of Fargo needs to start making some positive steps" to improve relations, School Board President Mike Lavelle said.

If they TIF without regard to what happens to West Fargo schools and others, "litigation may be our only option to get their attention," Lavelle said. "We're an injured party here. We should not be put upon at the whims of the (Fargo) City Commission and planner."

Business Manager Mark

Lemer said that, for now, the School District may have little choice but to put up with Fargo's decision.

"Ultimately, we may find this very frustrating," Lemer said.

But Lavelle said all the parties have choices.

"It's their choice to have a positive or negative relationship," Lavelle said.

"All we ask is that we be treated as an equal partner, and be treated with respect.

"I'm a resident of Fargo in the West Fargo School District. I am damn sick and tired of this. ..."

Superintendent Chuck Cheney said he's put Fargo officials on notice that they "will be held accountable" for all aspects of the TIF district.

Cheney said he believes Fargo's TIF districts are "loosely monitored" and the city is not careful with how funds are used.

"Anytime something like this happens to us, we don't have a lot of trust," board member Duane Hanson said.

Hanson, referring to a Fargo School District business advisory task force report, said suggestions of using TIF authority to get West Fargo's attention have hurt relations.

He said he wants "a more open dialogue. We need to know their intentions are honorable."

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