



## **GORD - Gordon: Vacant Building Report**

**Location Summary:** The Gordon school building is located at 2220 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue North in Minneapolis. One block south of Golden Valley Road, two blocks north of Plymouth Avenue and one-half block west of Penn Avenue North, the site is surrounded by predominately single-family housing typical of the Willard-Hay neighborhood. Constructed in 1951 as the Talmud Torah school building, the building is 20,669 square feet on three floors. The building includes nine classrooms and gymnasium/performance multi-purpose space that also served as the school lunchroom when the Gordon building operated as part of the Willard Community School.

Gordon shares a public site with the adjacent Willard building and Willard Park, owned by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. The Gordon Center originally occupied a quarter block between Queen Avenue North and the alley between Penn and Queen Avenues. The original address was 1616 Queen Avenue North. Willard originally occupied one entire city block across Queen Avenue, and Willard Park originally occupied a quarter block directly north of Gordon Center. Queen Avenue North was later vacated and both buildings and the park now occupy one contiguous site bounded on three sides by public streets and the fourth side by a public alley.

Except for some apartment buildings on Golden Valley Road, limited office space and North Point Clinic at Penn and Plymouth, and a few churches, surrounding blocks are detached residential construction. North Commons is four blocks away; Lincoln School, the subject of another vacant building report, five blocks away; and North High is six blocks away. The mature neighborhood is extensively built out, with limited undeveloped parcels. Most of the housing stock was built before 1940.

The building exhibits extensive physical and functional obsolescence; by itself is not suited for elementary instruction or large enough for any minimal elementary program. For instructional purposes, Gordon was paired with the Willard building to provide adequate spaces for complete programming. Instructional use of this two-building site ended in June 2005, at which time enrollment was 199 students. Since then, heat has been maintained and building use has been used for temporary storage of used district furniture and equipment.

**Site Description:** As noted above, Gordon shares one site with the Willard building. The MPS-owned site is “L” shaped, and Willard Park fills out the interior corner of the “L”, creating an overall rectangular site. The vacated Queen Avenue North runs north-south through the site from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Avenues North. For the purposes of this report, the Gordon site will be defined as the southern portion of the area east of the centerline of vacated Queen Avenue and extending easterly to the alley between Penn and Queen Avenues North. To the north is Willard Park. The area west of the centerline of vacated Queen Avenue is the Willard site.

The Gordon site is rectangular with approximate dimensions of 159 feet x 282 feet and 44,796 square feet (1.03 acres) in area. Its topography slopes down from south to north. The north portion of the site is generally flat and, apart from a paved basketball court and toilet/storage building and paved walkways built by the Park Board (on MPS property), is a grassy play area including a fenced backstop in the northwest corner. Willard Park includes a play structure, swings and a wading pool. The total

change of elevation is approximately nine feet, mostly occurring in a slope immediately north of the building.

The school was built on the south end of the site, fronting Queen Avenue North. As a result of the subsequent vacation of Queen Avenue, the main entrance is no longer visible from any street. In addition, this entrance is not accessible or adjacent to the main office. The accessible entrance, door #7, does face 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue North but is adjacent to the parking lot and not visible from the street. The paved parking lot is to the south and west of the building and accessed from Russell Avenue North.

Reflecting the adjacent neighborhood, the Minneapolis zoning designation for the Gordon site is R1A, a low-density residence district. There is no overlay zoning. In the Minneapolis 2040 plan, the “Future land use” is “Parks and Open Space”, applicable to areas generally free from development and primarily used for parks and recreation and similar uses. The “Built form district” for the site is “Parks”, intended to promote buildings that support typical parks activities.

Most residential lots are less than 6,000 square feet, with a small number of larger lots scattered throughout the neighborhood. In 2019, the median price of a home in Willard was \$198,450, less than the median assessed value in Minneapolis (\$249,000) and the median Twin Cities sales price (\$290,000) at that time

**Building Description:** The Gordon Center was not originally designed as a public elementary school. It was designed to support programming for Talmud Torah school and serve as a community center for the northside Jewish population. The reinforced concrete structure was designed in the low horizontal style of its time, with minimal floor-to-floor dimensions, a beige brick exterior and large, nearly continuous bands of windows.

The building initially included classrooms, a nursery and library space. All the classrooms were smaller than 600 square feet. None of the classrooms were built with wardrobe spaces characteristic of older school buildings, which fell out of favor in mid-century school design. In addition, none of the classrooms included toilet rooms as all toilet rooms were built on the first floor. Following district purchase of the building in 1967, several classrooms were combined to create larger classrooms, the office and library were converted into classrooms and second floor toilet rooms were built.

In keeping with the low-slung nature of mid-century school design, the main entrance was directly on grade and sheltered by a large overhang. Although the building contains no elevator, the first floor is nominally accessible although modifications are required to conform to present guidelines and requirements.

The building includes a gymnasium/auditorium and small stage area. The gym is 35-50% the square footage and approximately 80% the ceiling height of a contemporary elementary gymnasium. The stage is the size of a small classroom and acoustics, while requiring upgrading and renewal, more closely reflect performance space requirements than is typical of such a combined space.



**Building Condition:** Building condition at Gordon has been assessed along three dimensions: educational adequacy; facility condition; and accessibility review. All three indices identify deficiencies and estimate the costs, at the time of assessment, to remedy the deficiencies.

Educational adequacy attempts to measure the gap that inherently develops in buildings as pedagogical, technology, regulatory and community guidelines, standards, expectations, and requirements evolve over time. Educational adequacy is a measure of functional obsolescence. Examples of educational adequacy deficiencies at Gordon include construction of additional classrooms; a safe and welcome entrance; larger gymnasium; separate lunchroom/kitchen spaces; a new HVAC system (including air conditioning) throughout the building; provision for a small, accessible and flexible performance space; and new classroom technology and furniture throughout.

Facility condition identifies existing building systems and attempts to estimate their remaining serviceable life and forecast costs to renew those systems in an affordable and proactive manner. Facility condition is a measure of physical obsolescence. Gordon was assessed in September 2019 and \$1.9 million of current condition deficiencies were identified and another \$0.8 million was identified no later than 2028. Examples of facility condition deficiencies at Gordon include window, roof, and parking lot paving replacement; extensive wall, floor and ceiling finish replacement; and substantial electrical and mechanical replacement.

Accessibility reviews identify deficiency remedy costs for complete conformance with guidelines and requirements related to mobility and accessibility. Accessibility review is an additional measure of functional obsolescence. Gordon was assessed in June 2017 and approximately \$315,000 of deficiency remedy costs were identified. Examples include the installation of an elevator between floor and lift to access the stage; parking and signage; drinking fountains; toilet modifications; door width and hardware; removal of protrusions and obstacles; and grab bar installations.

**Operating Costs:** Four-year electricity and natural gas costs at Gordon average \$12,340 per year. If the building was reoccupied, this figure could be expected to increase to \$24,000-30,000, in line with similar buildings in the district. Chemical treatment for boiler operation averages an additional \$1,200 per year. Custodians are not assigned to Gordon but could be expected to average \$55,000 per year if the school was operating.

**Neighborhood Sketch:** The Gordon building is in the Willard-Hay neighborhood which is part of the Near North community in north Minneapolis. Boundaries are West Broadway to the north; Penn and Plymouth Avenues (and other neighborhood streets) to the east; Olson Memorial Highway on the south; and Minneapolis city limits to the west. The Jordan neighborhood shares the northern boundary; the Near North neighborhood shares the eastern boundary; the Harrison neighborhood is to the south; and the suburb of Golden Valley is to the west.

Estimated population in 2018 was 9,751, up from 9,177 in 2000, of whom 3,022 (31.0%) were age 17 and under and 826 (8.5%) were 65 and older. Over 27% of residents identified as White; 15.3% as foreign-born; nearly 77% spoke English only; over 79% had lived in the same residence for more than one year; and 28% moved into their residence prior to the year 2000.



Median household income is over \$45,000 (2018 dollars) and 25.9% of the population live with income less than poverty designation. Total households are 2,993; nearly 54% owner-occupied and 55% of occupied construction built before 1940. 84% of residents are high school graduates (or higher) and 29% hold bachelor's degrees (or higher).<sup>1</sup>