



WILL - Willard: Vacant Building Report

Location Summary: The Willard school building is located at 2220 16th Avenue North in Minneapolis. One block south of Golden Valley Road, two blocks north of Plymouth Avenue and one block west of Penn Avenue North, the site is surrounded by predominately single-family housing typical of the Willard-Hay neighborhood. Constructed in 1910, with an addition in 1920, the building is 55,635 square feet on three floors. The building includes twenty-two classrooms; media center; office and staff work rooms; and gymnasium/performance space/lunchroom.

Willard shares a public site with the adjacent Gordon Center, subject of a separate vacant building report, and Willard Park, owned by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. Willard originally occupied one entire city block. The Gordon Center originally occupied a quarter block across Queen Avenue North to the east. 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, the surrounding blocks are detached residential construction. North Commons is four blocks away; Lincoln School is 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 before 1940.

The building exhibits extensive physical and functional obsolescence; is marginally suited for elementary instruction and scarcely large enough for a minimal two-kindergarten elementary program enrolling 270 to 300-plus students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. For instructional purposes, Willard was paired with the Gordon Center in 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 infrequent and episodic.

Site Description: As noted above, Willard shares one site with the Gordon Center. 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 16th and 17th Avenues North. For the purposes of this report, the Willard site will be defined as the area west of the centerline of vacated Queen Avenue and extending westerly to Russell Avenue North. The area east of the centerline of vacated Queen Avenue and extending easterly to the alley is the Gordon Center site to the south and Willard Park to the north.

The Willard site, with the original address of 1615 Queen Avenue North, is rectangular with approximate dimensions of 300 feet x 603 feet and 181,734 square feet (4.17 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 16th 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 Willard 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: Designed by local architect E. S. Stebbins, the Willard and Tuttle buildings followed the same layout and design. Similarly, both were expanded in the 1920s in the same fashion. The reinforced concrete structure with a gray brick façade with stone sills and lintels highlighting the very large window openings in the classrooms that alternate with individual windows that were originally in the wardrobe and other smaller spaces. The arched opening at the main entrance is trimmed in stone and decorative pediments articulate the roofline at the center and end bays that project slightly from the façade.

All classrooms were built with wardrobe spaces (coat closets and storage), many of which have been subsequently removed to enlarge the instructional space. Incorporating the wardrobe space increased the original classrooms to an average size of 880 square feet with minimal area variation among rooms. No rooms were built or for any supplemental instruction in art, music or other subjects.

Typical of the time, the main entrance included exterior stairs and other entrances had interior stairs to reach the first floor. One result of this, decades later, was that the building was not accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The solution required the construction of an accessible entrance, not at the main entrance or the address entrance, but at the rear of the building. This entrance serves only an elevator that was installed at that time. A secondary result is that Tuttle does not have a secure entrance/office included or planned in all current school buildings.

In 1920, an addition was built at the northwest corner of the school, expanding the school from an “I” to an “L” layout. The new construction included thirteen new classrooms, including one designated as a kindergarten room and a large “play room” later divided into two classrooms. Three classrooms were later consolidated into a media center. The addition was designed to accommodate a light well that retained natural light in rooms that would have otherwise been rendered windowless.

The original building included a gymnasium/auditorium with a small stage in a two-story volume extending from the current second floor level to the current third floor ceiling height.

This new gym is approximately 40%-50% the square footage and approximately 100% the ceiling height of a contemporary elementary gymnasium. No dedicated multi-purpose or lunchroom space exists at Willard.

Building Condition: Building condition at Willard 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. When last evaluated in 2015, anticipated deficiency remedy costs at Willard were nearly \$12 million, a number that has escalated to \$15 million in 2020. Examples of educational adequacy deficiencies at Willard include construction of a safe and welcome entrance; larger gymnasium and 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. Willard was assessed in September 2019 and \$6.7 million of current condition deficiencies were identified and another \$1 million was identified no later than 2028. Examples of facility condition deficiencies at Willard include window and roof and rainwater leader replacement; wall, floor and ceiling finish replacement; fire alarm and lighting replacement; air handling unit replacement; and boiler and radiation 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. Willard was assessed in April 2017 and approximately \$165,000 of deficiency remedy costs were identified. Examples include signage; drinking fountains; toilet room upgrades; removal of protrusions and obstacles; grab bar installations; and modifications of ramps and landings.

Collectively, the above deficiencies suggest required investment (in 2020 dollars) approaching \$22 million for renovations and additions to an existing building that has a current replication value of \$19 million. Upon completion, the result will be a school serving approximately 280 students. Construction of a replacement building conforming to all program prototype guidelines and current instructional practices and standards could be expected to cost \$29 million (2020 dollars).

Operating Costs: Four-year electricity and natural gas costs at Willard average \$24,000 per year. If the building was reoccupied as a school, this figure could be expected to increase to \$36,000-48,000, 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 Willard but could be expected to average \$140,000 per year if the school was operating.



Neighborhood Sketch: The Willard 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).