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POLK COUNTY SCHOOLS

School board considers moving district offices to Winter Haven

Gary White
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Polk County School Board is considering moving the district's main office to Winter Haven after decades in Bartow.

The School Board heard a presentation at its Nov. 17 workshop on the potential purchase of the State Farm property at 7401 Cypress Gardens Blvd. in Winter Haven. The owner is offering five contiguous parcels totaling 104.67 acres.

The agenda description for the workshop did not list a sale price.

The State Farm site holds three office buildings with a combined area of about 432,000 square feet, according to Polk County property records. The buildings were constructed in 1992.

The school district's main office occupies 14.36 acres at 1915 S. Floral Ave. in Bartow. The district bought the property in 1972, according to county property records, and constructed the current building in 1981.

During a discussion at the workshop, Polk Schools Superintendent Fred Heid said that the district would need to spend a considerable sum of money to modernize the Bartow office. He said that would involve building upward to

See OFFICES, Page 6A



This file photo from 2003 shows the State Farm Insurance office at 7401 Cypress Gardens Blvd. in Winter Haven. Polk County Public Schools is considering purchasing the site for use as its main office. THE LEDGER FILE



An artistic rendering is shown of a pedestrian-only street between Kentucky Avenue and Tennessee Avenue lined with homes, based on a Midtown redevelopment plan for The Nine developed by consultants Dover, Kohl & Partners and adopted by city commissioners on Nov. 16. PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF LAKELAND

From blight to 'The Nine'

Lakeland OKs Midtown redevelopment plan

Sara-Megan Walsh
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Lakeland officials are hoping a rebranding and new identity will help transform one of the city's blighted areas into Downtown's backyard.

"The Nine" is a new identity for a nine-block section of Lakeland's Midtown, previously known as the Mass Market area. It runs from U.S. 98/Bartow Road north to Memorial Boulevard and from Florida Avenue east to Massachusetts Avenue. The neighborhood was separated from Lakeland's Downtown by the opening of the In-Town Bypass in 2004.

City commissioners voted unanimously Nov. 16 to adopt the Lakeland Community Redevelopment Agency's redevelopment plan for the "The Nine," which includes rebranding the area and a vision plan to create a mixed-use development combining residential and commercial.

"It could be in the future the most well recognized and well regarded residential neighborhood, along with other things," said Victor Dover, principal-in-charge of consultant Dover, Kohl & Partners.

Dover said the nine-block area covers 42 acres, of which 30 acres is under the city and CRA's control. Overall, it's about 60% of the area.

"You as a the master developers of the community, the city and the CRA, get to drive the boat and determine how this will turn out," he said.

Karen Thompson, senior manager for the Lakeland CRA, said this plan cast a clear, new identity for this section of Midtown to give the nine blocks its own distinctive unmistakable

See PLAN, Page 6A

Polk native focuses on voting rights

Gary White
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Leading up to the Nov. 3 election, Polk County native Anna Baldwin actively engaged in legal challenges against the federal agency that had been Baldwin's employer for 14 years, the Department of Justice.

As director of voting rights litigation for the Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., Baldwin led legal drives aimed at blocking Trump Administration proposals that the group contended would curtail voting.



Baldwin

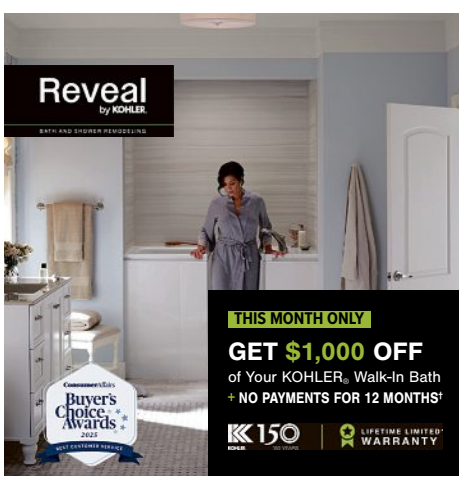
"I've been litigating a number of cases against federal agencies and the Department of Justice, which is strange, to find myself on the other side of the V. (for versus), now suing the Department of Justice," Baldwin said. "But it's really, the department has abandoned its historic rule of law mission with respect to elections and has really become an actor that's trying to subvert a lot of our bedrock separation of powers rules."

The Campaign Legal Center has been involved in about 30 legal challenges, and Baldwin expressed relief that the election proceeded without the federal intervention that some judicial observers had anticipated.

"I'm delighted that elections worked the way that they are supposed to — that, in our decentralized elections, the election workers did what they're supposed to do," Baldwin said. "I am happy not to be litigating lots of post-election nonsense."

Baldwin, 48, was born in Lakeland

See RIGHTS, Page 2A



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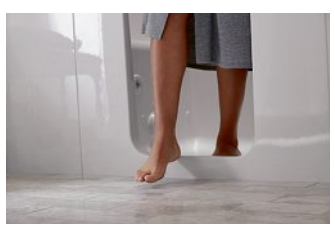

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