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Pastor shows School Board plan for property use



This aerial view of the property is in the proposal that Pastor Johnnie Jones III, the president of the Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc. (MFA) has given to the Levy County School Board and Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison.

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 7, 2018 at 2:08 p.m.

WILLISTON -- Pastor Johnnie Jones III, the president of the Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc. (MFA) has given the Levy County School Board and Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison a 30-page detailed proposal showing how the MFA and other groups would serve the area at the former site of Williston Middle School, in the unincorporated area of Levy County east of Williston.

The MFA has named the future site The Legacy Center Community Life Multiplex. In short, it is known now as The Legacy Center (or TLC). This plan includes a significant amount of different services for the people of the area.

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This proposal does not have a dollar amount, because if the School Board wants sealed bids, then Jones would have given competitors an edge. It does show, though, how other counties with shuttered schools used innovation to keep those abandoned properties from becoming part of the blight and slum of any area.

This plan shows how in almost one fell swoop, The Legacy Center could become the mecca for many services that are seen by some as lacking there now.

Some challenges Jones notes as specific to Williston are:

- No indoor public recreational space
- No full-service senior center
- No adult career and technical training center
- No public gymnasium
- No free health clinic
- No public auditorium
- No business incubator or start-up commerce space

“The Legacy Center Advisory Group has plans to address these deficiencies and meet the identified needs within the first 12 months of operation,” he wrote. “This will make a major lifestyle and economic impact in Williston and Levy County almost immediately.”

In a note to supporters, Pastor Jones said the Levy County School Board could put this on its agenda for discussion and decision as early as Tuesday, March 13.

The document he provided includes, facts, figures, pictures, maps and drawings.

It also includes letters of support for the extensive plan.

Those letters of support are from Drollene P. Brown, Citizen/Member of Citizens for an Engaged Electorate/AARP;

Boys and Girls Club of Alachua County Executive Director Shane Johnson; Elder Options Executive Director Kristen Griffis;

Central Florida Community Action Agency CEO Charles Harris; Unity Temple International Fellowship Bishop Willie A. Battles; Unity Family Community Center Executive Director Joyce Wilson; Partnership for Strong Families President/CEO

Stephen Pennypacker; Fountain of Life Church Senior Pastor Johnnie Jones III (who is also the MFA president); CDS Family and Behavioral Services Inc. CEO Jim Pearce, CEO; and WE SOAR Inc. President Mimi Johnson.

Jones said it is a foundation on which the interested parties can build.

The preacher noted when he sent his email on Tuesday (March 7) that “I write this with a heavy heart after the passing of our Board Secretary, community pastor, leader and friend Pastor Charles Williams Jr. yesterday.”

All of the following is essentially copied and pasted, with little editing, from Jones’ plan that he gave the School Board and Superintendent Edison.

The plan for the property shows seven centers of activities.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

A Community Resource Center will serve to meet the day-to-day needs of all strata of the public through volunteer coordination, program planning and providing the important resource of a public gathering place where any citizen or group of citizens can offer benefit to the community at large. The Community Resource Center would be one of the first service centers to launch at the Legacy Center.

COMMERCE

There is an identified shortage of small business start-up and incubation space in and around Williston. Among the many ways that this project will have economic impact is by providing needed space at an affordable cost to entrepreneurs and by supporting existing businesses with partnership and training opportunities.

HEALTH

Currently there is no free and charitable clinic within Levy County. There are only two such

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clinics in Marion County and none in Dixie or Gilchrist counties. An MFA partner sees benefit in bringing such a clinic to The Legacy Center to help address some of the health needs of Williston and Levy County. A free and charitable clinic would offer preventive medicine, health education, early diagnosis and opportunities for those interested in pursuing careers in healthcare.

EDUCATION

From the days of Williston Vocational School this site has been associated with meeting the educational needs of the area. MFA has been discussing with the College of Central Florida the possibility of providing general education, dual enrollment and career and technical educational programs at this site. CF is interested in partnering with The Legacy Center to meet some of these needs on this side of the county. Other groups would offer homework assistance, college and career preparation and adult educational programming. The facility is also suitable for a library and computer lab.

SENIOR CITIZENS

There are nearly 8,000 persons aged 65 years and older in Levy County and only one Senior Center to serve them. The Senior Center component of The Legacy Center would be open to serve this population from its first day of operations.

NON-PROFIT

In addition to The Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc., the IRS lists 54 other 501(c)3 organizations registered in Williston. There is no shortage of organizations each making an impact and working toward change in their specific areas. The goal of The Legacy Center is to provide a single place where these and other non-profit organizations can collaborate and leverage efforts to address the needs of overlapping service groups. A Non-Profit Incubator is planned to provide administrative and program space and encourage collaboration.

YOUTH RECREATION

Youth recreation continues to be one of the most requested services for the Williston area. Providing positive athletic and non-athletic recreational outlets for children improves behavioral and health outcomes. It supports the wellbeing of the entire community. Providing children with a safe, stimulating, healthy environment after school hours helps working parents and reduces the burden on law enforcement and other community resources. MFA been in discussion with both the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. The Boys and Girls Club has offered to provide staff and programming on site at The Legacy Center and the YMCA has offered the same plus transportation from The Legacy Center to the main facility for aquatic programs. The indoor gym would be available to the Williston Youth Athletic Association and the City of Williston's Summer Recreational Programs.

Jones said in an interview Wednesday afternoon (March 7) that he has four or five paths to completion.

Joining President Jones as members of the MFA Executive Board are Vice President Willie A. Battles, Treasurer Carl Carnegie, and Chaplain Reginald L. Williams. As Jones noted Secretary Charles Williams Jr. just passed away this week.

What President Jones seeks from the School Board are steps that the School Board would like to him to next take to move forward on this plan.

For anyone who wants to contact The Legacy Center, the mailing address is:

THE LEGACY CENTER

P.O. Box 382

Williston, FL 32696.

The email is TLCWilliston@gmail.com.

For updates and to download an electronic version of the proposal, the website is <https://thelegacycenter.org/>.

To speak to an office assistant, via telephone, please call **352-538-4474**.