



DATE: January 31, 2022

MEMO TO: Jessica Vealitzek, Chair
Operations Committee

Terry Wilke, Chair
Planning Committee

FROM: Randall L. Seebach
Director of Planning and Land Preservation

REQUEST: Provide policy direction regarding the potential relocation or removal of the Cramer and Borland Cabins at the Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION SUPPORTED: Organizational Sustainability

FINANCIAL DATA: At this time there is no financial impact.

BACKGROUND: In 1996, a portion of the Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area (“Ryerson”) was placed on the National Register of Historic Places for its social and architectural significance from 1923 to 1945. There were 10 existing buildings, including four cabins, that were designated as contributing to the time period of significance. For over 30 years, two of the contributing cabins, known as the Cramer and Borland cabins (the “Classroom Cabins”), have been used as classrooms for environmental education programming. The Classroom Cabins were built in the 1920s and 30s as weekend retreats. There is a total of five cabins at Ryerson – the fifth cabin does not contribute to the historic significance of the site.

At its March 2021 meeting, the Operations Committee reviewed a list of existing District buildings identified for removal, which included all five of the existing cabins at Ryerson, and it was the consensus of the Committee to proceed with the removals as listed. The Classroom Cabins are reaching the end of their useful life, are not compliant with accessibility codes, and are not properly sized to meet the District’s current programming needs. In addition, their waste water system is undersized based on current and projected future use.

In May 2021 and again in June 2021, the Planning Committee reviewed and provided favorable comments regarding a proposed site plan and schematic building design for a new environmental education facility at Ryerson, the construction of which will require the removal of the Classroom Cabins and the placement of the new facility at the same location as the Classroom Cabins. Construction of Phase I for the new facility is scheduled to start in June 2022.

District staff recently discussed the plans for the new education facility and the removal of the Classroom Cabins with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA). The IHPA stated that the removal of the Classroom Cabins would be considered an adverse effect and requested that the

District look into alternatives to the full removal; alternatives include the potential relocation of the Classroom Cabins to another location at Ryerson or the potential sale of the Classroom Cabins to another entity that would relocate them offsite and maintain their historical integrity. Inclusion of a building on the National Register of Historic Places does not, by itself, prevent the building's owner from demolishing the building. However, according to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the demolition of the Classroom Cabins will likely impact the District's ability to secure future IDNR grants for Phase II of the new education facility.

Staff is seeking direction from the Committee on whether to explore options for the relocation of the Classroom Cabins which may include (if relocation is feasible) soliciting proposals for the sale of the Classroom Cabins and/or soliciting public bids for the relocation of the Classroom Cabins to another location at Ryerson. If the Committees direct that such exploration proceed, staff would bring back the results of the proposals/bidding to the Committees for their review and approval at a future meeting. If the Committees direct that demolition of the Classroom Cabins should proceed, then staff will proceed with demolition of all five cabins before the start of construction of Phase I of the new education facility.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Finance, Director of Education, Corporate Counsel.