

## Frequently Asked Questions About River Grove's Temporary Stillwater Location



*Our mission is to utilize the natural resources, history, arts, and civic stewardship of the community as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, art, and other curriculum subjects.*

*The place-based learning environment will be student centered, designed by teachers, and reinforced and supported by the local community.*

Apr 21, 2023

Dear River Grove Families,

Thank you for sending your questions regarding the Zephyr location and to [faq@marineareaschool.org](mailto:faq@marineareaschool.org). This document is a work-in-progress, and we will update it as more information is available.

***Innovation and growth are not new at River Grove.*** We started from scratch in 2017-18 with 160 students and area families trusting us to build something special. We did! We grew and adapted as enrollment rapidly increased, and we made it through the COVID requirements that required radical rethinking of how school is delivered—from food service and transportation to class configuration and curriculum delivery. In this past year—even with the property uncertainty—we dedicated ourselves to expanding our mission and vision and deepening our understanding and implementation of our unique educational model.

***Outdoor- and place-based learning will remain as centerpieces of River Grove's educational model.*** The school is committed to implementing existing expertise and developing new ways to take students outside in nature and in the community. We are already thinking of ways to adapt our programming for the temporary site and to get the kids out exploring, enjoying, and learning in nature in a new location.

***"Promising" is not strong enough to describe River Grove's future!*** We have an incredible opportunity to build a world-class facility with an amazing and committed partner, Manitou Fund. While we are sad to leave Wilder Forest, the tremendously successful program we've built here will continue to flourish in our interim phase at Zephyr, growing into an immersive educational experience that will benefit students, families, and our community for decades to come.

We hope you choose to come grow with us!

Sincerely,

The Team at River Grove

## What are the new ways we will live out our mission?

### PLACE- AND OUTDOOR-BASED

- *What outdoor opportunities will there be next year?*

#### **New School Site**

Students will have daily outdoor exploration opportunities to utilize local assets adjacent to or within walking distance from the Zephyr such as the Brown's Creek Trail, Pioneer Park, and Lowell Park. Lumberjack Landing is immediately adjacent to the property. This future park site is an interesting project for the city and could be an asset to the school. We are unsure about city timelines and plans but will gain more details as our partnership with the city develops. We look forward to collaborating with the City of Stillwater in any usage of public spaces.

#### **Warner Site**

We will have unlimited access to the Warner Nature Center property. The school has also forged nature-based learning partnerships with several area universities (U of M, Hamline) and will continue to partner with them for next school year. This is something that we will establish and schedule with our teaching staff. Regular utilization of the property is certainly a priority for us as we continue with our place-based curriculum focus.

There is a current picnic shelter, outbuilding, and amphitheater on the site. We have held initial conversations with Manitou Fund, the site's owner, and we believe that additional temporary shelters and structures are a possibility. Staff has done extensive research on yurts and other portables. More specifics will be established this summer.

#### **St. Croix River**

The school has formed a strong connection with Wild Rivers Conservancy and has been recognized by that organization with an award for our efforts for getting students "on the river." We look forward to the continuation of this partnership and to adding additional partnerships.

While the St. Croix River is not immediately adjacent to the property, it can be accessed at several locations close to the Zephyr or at sites a short bus ride away. We will develop a student water safety plan with local authorities.

### STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

- *How will we continue to support Project-Based Learning (PBL)?*

PBL is a core component of our school and one that we have significantly invested in; it will be a key part of our program moving forward. There will be an incredible number of PBL opportunities in the community, given the building's immediate surrounding assets. We have already begun discussing possibilities with local entities and partners.

### SPECIALISTS

- *What will specialist times look like?*

#### **PE/Outdoor Recreation**

There are a variety of walking and recreational trails. We are also exploring partnership with facilities for a potential for gym space.

We have a creative outdoor-centered staff and community. We will continue to offer snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing and other activities on the Warner Property and other local recreation areas.

### **Band/Orchestra**

We love band/orchestra and would like to continue the program. However, it is dependent on staffing and space. We will explore creative formats and scheduling options, if necessary.

### **Art, Music, and Performance Arts**

It goes without saying that we will continue our partnership with the Zephyr Theatre's music and performing arts staff. Classroom art will remain part of the regular specialist curriculum.

## **RECESS**

- *What will recess look like?*

The architectural firm and building team are experienced school site planners and developers. A safe outdoor play space is a priority as we develop the final site plan with the property owner and learn what adjacent area resources are available to us.

## **TEACHER TEAMS and STAFF**

- *Will the teacher teams stay the same as they are this year for special ed and classroom teachers?*

We are gathering staff input for next year along with actively recruiting to fill potential vacancies, as we do every year. We will have a clearer picture as time develops.

## **Operations and Administration**

### **TIMELINE**

- *When will the school be able to occupy the temporary building?*

This is still in development. Initial estimates are a 2-3 month renovation period, but plans are to use a phased approach that will allow occupancy as quickly as able.

- *Will the school year be delayed?*

We hope to start the school year at a traditional time period but a short delay may be possible. Our staff and board will be discussing this at future meetings.

## **SAFETY AT ZEPHYR AND WARNER**

- *What measures will be taken to ensure a safe learning experience for our students no matter where they are?*

Safety planning and implementation is a top priority for the new property owners, the site developers, and River Grove. Previously the school has worked with local entities, local law enforcement, the Minnesota

School Safety Center Program, and the Dept. of Homeland Security to establish safety protocols for our school. We will re-engage these entities in the planning of our new site plan and comprehensive safety procedures while on-site, downtown, and anywhere students are. The landlord also plans the installation of a high-tech and comprehensive security system.

## FOOD SERVICE

- *Will some sort of food service bring in lunches daily since there is no formal kitchen?*

We are working on food service options. We believe we have a few options available to us including possible partnership with local entities.

- *Where will students eat lunch?*

This will be decided after the design process is completed.

- *If students spend the day at Warner, will they be given bag lunches to take?*

Yes, students will most likely be given a cold-lunch option like a field trip.

## PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION

- *What will parking look like?*

It will be established as the final site and traffic plan. We are currently developing a comprehensive traffic and parking plan as part of the design and approval process.

## ZEPHYR BUILDING/CLASSROOM LAYOUT

- *Will the theater be in use by the Zephyr people during school? After school?*

Zephyr programming is still in development. Their organization is using this opportunity to reset and revamp. As part of our lease they will be allowed to access the space during non-school times (nights and weekends). We also anticipate growing our already successful educational programming with them as a partner and foresee a variety of exciting opportunities for River Grove students and families.

- *What will the classroom spaces look like?*

Classrooms will fit between 11-22 students, which is reflective of the current class sizes at River Grove. Our current average class size is 17. We will work with the design team on the most efficient use of each space in terms of furniture, storage and seating. There will be a space for occupational therapy, speech, and related services.

## ENROLLMENT

- *Is the goal to keep River Grove the same size at the Zephyr location? If some parents opt out, will the class sizes be smaller or will additional enrollment achieve the current size?*

We will be having a board meeting the week of April 24th where we will be discussing enrollment as we navigate our new space and potential capacity issues in relation to class sizes and sections.

## OTHER

- *Will summer school be offered?*

We do not plan to offer summer school this year.

- *Will you have before- or after-school care at the new location?*

Every fall, we survey parents to find out their needs. If enough children sign up, we will look at planning for after-hours care.

## Next Steps

- *Will the same architect be used to develop the Warner property?*

This will be up to Manitou (landlord).

- *Will construction on the Warner property be running consecutively with that of the Zephyr?*

This will be up to Manitou (landlord).

Our goal is to get back to the forest as quickly as time will allow but we (Manitou and the school) also want to make sure any build is done in a professional, comprehensive, and environmentally conscious manner. We believe that the two-year period is a reasonable goal, but like with any project there could be unforeseen challenges. The 2+2-year lease arrangement with the Zephyr location allows us to navigate this. Our focus has been primarily on a solution for next school year, we will begin the planning process with May Township and other entities after a successful transition.

- *Will River Grove expand beyond 6th grade?*

Our primary goal in the near future is to establish our temporary home as we work towards building a world class campus. We do believe that grade expansion is something our parent community is interested in and could be a part of future long-term planning. It would require an extensive process with our authorizer and collaboration and approval from other governing bodies.