

NRRI passes on naval building

It had the city's blessing and blueprints drawn up, but in the end the Natural Resources Research Institute in Hermantown declined the offer to take over the former Naval Reserve Building off Highway 53.

The Navy had left the building vacant a couple of years ago and the city of Hermantown was charged with finding a new tenant. NRRI, with its facility located just across the former Airport Road (the access to Highway 53 has since been eliminated), seemed like an ideal fit.

While the University of Minnesota had blueprints drawn up to extend the NRRI campus and use the building for educational purposes, it informed the federal government on Dec. 15 that it would not go ahead with those plans.

In a letter to the Federal Real Property Assistance Program, Michael Lalich, director at NRRI, stated there were several factors in making the decision to not move forward on the project.

The level of renovations required by the University to bring the building up to code, forecasted budget cuts and uncertain financial times, Lalich wrote that it was not in a position to accept the Naval Reserve building at this time.

"The building would have provided excellent office, meeting and laboratory space and presented a unique opportunity for the University to expand their programs," Lalich stated in his letter.

Lalich and the NRRI staff also wrote to Hermantown City Administrator Lynn Lander, thanking him and the city for its support during the process.

The U.S. Department of Education had requested assignment of the building on June 11. The NRRI has been operating at its current location since 1983.

With NRRI out of the picture, the Hermantown Economic Development Authority (HEDA) met Monday night to discuss other tenants. It was recommended that the Duluth Airport Authority be considered for the new tenant. The local organization is considering using the facility for training purposes.

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