



School/City Liaison Committee Approved Minutes



School/City Liaison Committee Meeting Thursday, March 6, 2003

Palo Alto Unified School District
District Office Room A
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto

APPROVED MINUTES

Representing the City of Palo Alto

Frank Benest, City Manager
Emily Harrison, Assistant City Manager
Jim Burch, Council Member
Yoriko Kishimoto, Council Member

Representing Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD)

Mary Frances Callan, Superintendent
Robert Golton, Deputy Superintendent
John Barton, Liaison Chair & School Board Member
John Tuomy, School Board Member

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barton at 9:05 a.m.

1. Oral Communications

Mr. Barton opened the floor to people wishing to present topics not on the agenda.

Ginger Craney, 631 Georgia Avenue, spoke regarding the Georgia Avenue gate closure. She said this appears to be a safety issue and that with the Terman opening, Terman students will not be able to get to the campus through the gate. She added that the community would not be able to get through either. If there is an emergency, there will be no exit at that end of the school and she questioned whether the Fire Department will allow that.

Larry Wertman, a Palo Alto resident, spoke regarding the PAUSD parcel tax and its effect on people living in Below Market Rate (BMR) units. He said he lives in a BMR unit and has a low income, so the PAUSD parcel tax of \$293 is a hardship. He then

pointed out that the teachers who are being helped by this tax have incomes that are more than four to five times those of BMR residents. He said he realized that by law there could not be an exemption for BMR owners, but asked that a program be created to help them pay this additional tax. He suggested forming a committee and possibly having the District reduce the tax for BMR residents by fifty percent.

Mr. Barton said that he has had conversations with Mr. Wertman and Joe Simitian and they have determined that any change would need to occur at the state level.

2. Approval of Minutes – February 6, 2003

Mr. Burch moved to approve the minutes. They were approved without objection.

3. Traffic Safety Program

Ms. Harrison introduced Steve Emslie, Director of Planning; Joe Kott, Chief Transportation Official; Lynne Johnson, Assistant Police Chief; and Pat Dwyer, Police Chief.

Mr. Emslie explained that Mr. Kott, as the City's Chief Transportation Official, is responsible for implementing the City's transportation policies of the Comprehensive Plan and maintaining the transportation system in a safe and efficient manner.

Mr. Kott said there has been a dramatic rise in traffic, both in Palo Alto and nationwide over the last 20 years, thus increasing dangers to those who do walk or cycle. He said this is because fewer kids walk and bike to school. He commended Kathy Durham, as well as the Center for Disease Control, for ongoing attempts to get more kids to bike and walk to school and said that while Palo Alto remains one of the country's most "walkable" and "bikeable" communities, measurable targets are needed for traffic reduction. He also said there are hazardous commute barriers to kids, such as Caltrain, Oregon Expressway, and El Camino Real.

Mr. Kott then gave an update on current and future activities, programs and plans. He said Ms. Durham is responsible for much of the good cycling and pedestrian training for younger Palo Alto residents. Gail Likens and the transportation staff have done an outstanding job in planning the Palo Alto Shuttle service, which is done in financial partnership with PAUSD, and will provide service to Jordan and Gunn. Awareness must be raised that walking and biking are good options in campaigns such as "Walk and Bicycle to School Day" and "National Bicycle Month". A major study, the "South Palo Alto School Commute Study", is being undertaken. All ten of the Palo Alto public school principals and their traffic safety representatives in South Palo Alto have been consulted regarding the conditions of each site. School site access and circulation must be better, safer and more convenient.

Mr. Kott said planning is being done city-wide on ways and means of reducing vehicle trips to schools. He believed an outstanding example of this type of planning

is the Gunn GoFast Program. It actively encourages the use of transit, cycling and walking. An important collateral program adopted by the City Council is the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program. Car speed on residential streets has been found to be a major concern for pedestrians and cyclists, so this program will find ways of slowing drivers down, but hopefully not impede the flow of commerce.

Mr. Kott said the Planning Division has sponsored an effort to redesign El Camino Real, thus making it more crossable. One operational change would be a new signal at Ventura and El Camino, which is currently uncontrolled. By 2004-05, Caltrans has agreed to design, construct and maintain this signal, in addition to paying two-thirds of the cost. Another plan is to make crosswalks more visible near schools and install LED radar readout (also know as "yellow green") speed signs on some of Palo Alto's residential arterial streets to make drivers more aware of their speeds and increase safety of pedestrians and cyclists. So far four have been placed and good results are expected.

Mr. Kott went on to say that the City is very concerned about the safety and convenience of access to the new Terman Middle School site. A working group emphasizing parental involvement, and including City and PAUSD staff, is being formed to develop a collaborative approach to ensure the safety of kids going to Terman. This group is stressing behavioral bicycle safety and the use of safer routes.

Mr. Kott said that a big emphasis in Palo Alto is on land development and the subsequent effects on traffic. An analysis is under way on all major intersections and the likely effects new development could have on them. A city-wide traffic impact fee is being considered to raise funding for traffic mitigations in order to make Palo Alto more community and transportation friendly. This would be used to improve shuttle services to schools, install and improve bike lanes and paths, purchase more LED speed signs, and paint more crosswalks. He commended the leadership of this group, but said that without more parent and resident involvement, achieving the aim of making travel in Palo Alto safer and more convenient cannot occur. He said that parents should not have their kids so dependent on them for transportation they lose out on opportunities not only for exercise, but to learn more about their town by seeing and doing, rather than just whizzing past in a car.

Chief Dwyer, pointed out the "three E's" of traffic safety: education, engineering, and enforcement. He then stressed the collaboration between the Police Department, the City and PAUSD. Police, in carrying out the enforcement part of traffic safety, are involved with constant dialogue with community members about problems. One of the most important things the Police Department does is respond to a school or neighborhood when they report that they have a problem.

Chief Dwyer then described some on-going programs. The Crossing Guard Program is a \$225,000 a year program funded by the City to protect kids going to school. The Back to School Program is run every year by Sgt. Scott Wong and Lt. Jon

Hernandez. Chief Dwyer said this was an incredible program that involved a lot of planning and effort to train parents on how to bring their kids to school safely. The Police Department sends out letters to all families in the District as a means of staying in touch with the community and reminding them about traffic safety issues. This seems to get more positive feedback than anything else. The City has commitments to both the Avoid the 13 Program and the Sober Graduation Program, which are funded by the same grant. Both of these are statewide programs. In the Sober Graduation Program, high school journalism students are walked through the booking and arraignment procedure of a drunk driving arrest, so they can report back to their peers on the experience. The Police Department also does special enforcement around the schools based on reports of problems. Lt. Hernandez has determined that the main traffic problems around schools are the “super blocks” around Meadow, Middlefield and Charleston, and Arastradero around Gunn High School.

Assistant Chief Johnson added that upon the positive urging of Ms. Kishimoto, one of the Police Department’s goals is to reduce the number of injury accidents in the “super block” areas. She also said that the department has received a grant from the Office of Traffic Safety to be used for focusing on the proper installation of child safety seats and seat belt use. In cooperation with the Transportation Department, another grant application for \$200,000 has also been recently submitted for heightened enforcement and joint education efforts. She then advised Mr. Kott that the fine for running red lights just went up to \$316, so he will have to change all the new LED speed signs, adding that Palo Alto is very fortunate to have such a strong working relationship with the schools and the Transportation Department.

Mr. Kott added that he is a firm believer in the effectiveness of the LED speed signs, as they are a constant reminder to slow down in school areas. They are also unobtrusive and not aesthetically offensive in any neighborhood. He thanked Chief Dwyer and his staff for having them installed in such a reasonable timeframe and said he hoped more would soon be installed.

Ms. Kishimoto said that around the Terman area, she believed that the Adobe Creek and Matadero Creek right of ways, which are in the City’s comprehensive plan to be used as potential bike paths, ought to be put to use. She believed this would be a very promising way for bikes and pedestrians to get to school safely. They go right by Terman and connect to Barron Park and Chaucer Meadow neighborhood as well.

Mr. Tuomy asked why something like this had not been done before.

Ms. Harrison said she suspected the issue was expense, but that did not mean this idea could not be examined more closely.

Dr. Callan said there are some safety issues that need to be addressed, especially for elementary kids who would be right next to the water.

Mr. Tuomy said there would be visibility issues, along with the presence of creek inhabitants. If these safety concerns could be addressed, he believed the use of the creek right of ways would be a good idea.

June Schiller, consultant to PAUSD, presented an update on the Terman Environmental Impact Report (EIR) mitigation. Three of the items concerned widening paths and moving drop-offs, all of which are under contract with Coulter Construction.

Augie Lavagnino, PAUSD Assistant Business Manager, said the site plan is just now being finished and everything is to be done at one time. The interior of the campus, along with all the bike paths, enhancements and improvements will be going out to bid in two weeks. Within a month these items will be under construction.

Mrs. Schiller said two of the items listed in the Terman EIR were on City property and were related to widening paths and making places for traffic coming off of Glenwood Drive, so some cooperation will have to take place between PAUSD and the City. Mrs. Schiller then said she met with the principals of Briones, Gunn, Terman and Mid-Peninsula Jewish Community Day School, and they have come to an agreement for staggered school start and end times. Kathy Durkin, PAUSD Transportation Manager, was also consulted concerning school bus schedules. Mrs. Schiller said the Children's International School use permit was a non-issue since the City never had an application on which to act. The City has budgeted for one or two crossing guards and is taking care of filling those positions. Monitoring pedestrian and bicycle traffic volume at the crosswalks and the intersection will have to be done after school starts. PAUSD may seek help from the traffic engineer to develop a plan. The use of an all-stop pedestrian signal is being considered. A comprehensive vehicle trip reduction program is being developed now. There is a meeting next week and Amanda Jones has been invited to come speak to the Chairmen. Mrs. Schiller said the PTA has written a draft plan for traffic reduction. A lot has already been done in regard to bicycle safety, including the training of kids about the routes they will take to get to school. There is also now a Chair for trip reduction. Larry Thomas, the Terman principal, is educating parents about not dropping children off at Glenbrook Drive, a promise that was made to the community. In January, the City Council awarded a contract to do the left turn pocket and the light, which should begin in March or April. Special event timing at the Jewish Community Day School and Terman is being worked on by the two principals. As an aside, Mrs. Schiller said that the Jewish Community Day School has put that property up for sale, and since it has not yet been sold, they still plan to run the school there. If the property should be sold, it is anticipated that another school will occupy the site and would take over whatever agreements are made between the Jewish Community Day School and PAUSD.

Kathy Durham, Chairperson of the PTA Council Traffic Safety Committee, said that many parents will not allow their kids to walk or bike because they feel it is not safe. She said an action plan needed to be put in place to turn this situation around,

especially in regard to reducing the risk of crashes involving student bicyclists and pedestrians. She added that as a result of the January 25th fatality, the reduction of risk of crashes involving student drivers needs to be added to the plan as well. Ms. Durham also noted that the City does not currently track crashes involving people under the age of 18. She said this was last done for the north portion of the School Commute Safety Study during 1992-95. It needs to be done again now so issues such as location and cause of accidents can be known. High-level dialog needs to take place in order to improve the situation by August. Encouraging alternatives to driving to school cannot be done by the PTA alone. She also said that in addition to the previously mentioned “three E’s” (education, engineering, and enforcement), a fourth “E” must be added: encouraging alternatives to driving to school. The collaboration of the City, the Police Department, PAUSD and the PTA is necessary to make this effective. Ms. Durham then said that a focus needs to be made on Charleston and Arastradero for next fall.

Betsy Allen, a Palo Alto resident, asked why all high school students with driver’s licenses have to be allowed to drive to school. She suggested that only high school seniors be allowed drive to school.

Debbie Duncan, Terman PTA Traffic Safety Representative, said the PTA is working on the traffic issue and would appreciate all the help they can get.

Joan Marx, Co-Chair of Gunn’s GoFast group, said the Georgia Avenue neighborhood, along with the City and the Transportation Department, have been doing a wonderful collaboration on the Georgia Avenue Program. A decision was made last night on traffic reduction. The neighbors feel very good about their relationship with the City and the Police Department, and this move in particular. Ms. Marx then commented on the implementation of the Alternative Travel Program at Terman. She said that consultation with a professional bicycle consultant to look at the access at that intersection was recommended by the Board before anything was built and that this has not yet been done. It must be done first, in order to encourage alternative transportation.

Mr. Burch, a member of Gunn’s GoFast committee, said he recently received the results of a survey and is concerned with the results in regard to attitudinal behavior. He also noted that car commercials promoting speed and power have a huge impact on kids. He noted that what kids see in advertising causes seventy-five percent of the impact. Kids need to be educated that the “freedom” promoted in such car commercials is not realistic. Ms. Marx added that this was a survey of 1,000 Gunn students.

Sue Luttner, a Terman parent, emphasized that the Terman plan is going to really require City and PAUSD cooperation.

Ms. Kishimoto expressed her support of the traffic reduction efforts. She also said she would like to see the support become citywide, extending to all Palo Alto

schools. She said the PTA council has asked for measurables and for performance measures on trip reduction, to be possibly compiled by Gail Likens' traffic group.

Dr. Callan said the first six months a young driver is driving, he or she is not allowed to ride with other kids. She then recommended that only fully licensed students be granted parking permits and that parking spaces ought to be considered a privilege. She said that when she goes out to the school sites, it is very dangerous and that she just did not think these kids should be driving. She theorized that part of this problem is due to the invincibility teenagers tend to feel.

A community member, residing in the Green Acres area, said that she liked the idea of community bike paths along the creeks. There is already a lot of dangerous activity in the Green Acres area, with Gunn kids and Barron Park kids coming through the neighborhood, and now there will be kids going to Terman as well. She asked if there is a safe way to contain the children at Briones, so Gunn kids are not driving through their route. She then said she wanted the bicycle consultant to look at the larger picture, rather than just Terman.

Betsy Allen, a Palo Alto resident, asked why high school kids have to be allowed by adults to drive to school. This would greatly reduce Embarcadero and Arastradero traffic. Driving is a privilege, not a right. She suggested that parents just say "No" to their kids.

Ms. Marx said she thought there were four areas in which she believed the City could help. The first is getting more school buses and maximizing capacity. Secondly, she said she would like the City to help PAUSD with getting grants to work on alternative traffic solutions. Thirdly, she asked the City to provide carpool priority drop-off zones. If there were special priority spaces, drop-off traffic could be reduced. And lastly, she said that Gunn is going to try a program involving giving first priority to kids the farthest distance from school (rather than seniority) and to carpoolers for parking.

Mr. Burch added that Gunn has two-tier parking fees, with a lower fee for carpools.

Ms. Durham said that yesterday, at the Palo Alto High School Traffic Safety meeting, the issue of restricting driving for kids living too close to campus came up. She also said that in regard to the group from Terman and its work with the District on school busing, she is encouraged that in this time of budget cuts that there has been willingness on the part of Dr. Golton to consider this issue.

Mr. Barton asked Chief Dwyer and Mr. Kott if there is any sense of whether or not what is being done so far is having an effect on traffic reduction and increasing safety.

Chief Dwyer said that the rate of the growth of auto dependence has been slowed. The next step is to actually reduce the tide of traffic. He then said there is a citywide

bicycle transportation master plan, which has gone through the City's Planning and Transportation Review, and will go to the City Council soon. It contains a comprehensive and continuous network of safe bicycle routes, including "bicycle boulevards", which are among the safest streets in town to bike on. He also noted that there is a proposed citywide "commute corridor network" that would connect all of Palo Alto's neighborhoods with all of its public schools. It will also be proposed to the City Council that a category of "school commute" streets with special regulatory protections be developed. This would include consideration for new investments in crosswalk improvements, bike lane improvements, intersection improvements, signalizations, and so forth. This would address the bottlenecks as well as improve links in order to make the whole trip to school safe.

Mr. Barton asked what the effect would be if people were not allowed to drive to school, and theorized that the reduction of one-way trips in the morning could be as much as 400 cars per day.

It was then noted that many of these kids would then be driven by their parents, so the reduction in traffic would not be that large.

Mr. Barton suggested that if more high school kids had to ride their bikes to school, more of their younger siblings, who are currently being driven, might ride their bikes along with them, thus reducing auto traffic in that manner. Then he said that if there was a sudden influx of kids cycling and walking to school, the District would need assistance from the City to get additional crossing guards and police officers, and he asked if the City would be willing to give this support.

Chief Dwyer said he was committed to examining this notion in more depth and keeping an open dialogue.

Mr. Kott said that there had to be some sort of mandate or legal authority in order for the City to take action. One idea might be to reinforce the positive by giving kids and families who avoid car trips a positive incentive to do so.

Dr. Golton said the District is not doing anything to control driving. It is controlling parking. Some high schools in the Bay Area have no parking, but kids still drive to school and simply park off campus. Here in Palo Alto, when a parking permit is denied, that in itself does not prevent a student from driving and parking off campus.

Ms. Harrison suggested a cooperative effort, such as installing two-hour parking zones all around the schools. This would create a prohibitive parking distance for students parking off campus.

Mr. Tuomy said the only remedy he saw was to enact two-hour parking limits for anyone without a resident's permit in a large radius around the schools. However this would then have to be enforced, and he did not see how that could happen.

Ms. Kishimoto suggested having a permit system.

Mr. Tuomy said He said that if the parent community is not willing to take on the challenge of changing their attitudes about sending their kids to school, he did not believe the problem could be solved. The parents need to find a way, with PAUSD and the City, to feel more secure about the safety of their kids.

Ms. Marx recommended adding buses.

Mr. Tuomy said if that were the case, a way must be found to fund them.

4. Future Meetings and Agenda Items

It was decided that the next meeting would take place on April 10th at 9 a.m.

Future agenda items discussed were playing fields and a status update for Terman EIR.

Adjournment at 10:30 a.m.