



School/City Liaison Committee Minutes



School/City Liaison Committee Meeting Wednesday, May 7, 2003

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

MINUTES

Representing the City of Palo Alto

Frank Benest, City Manager
Emily Harrison, Assistant City Manager
Jim Burch, Council Member
Yoriko Kishimoto, Council Member
Dawn Calvert, Superintendent, Recreation
Paul Dias, Director of Parks and Golf

Representing Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD)

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

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barton at 9:12 a.m.

1. Oral Communications

John Easter (1175 Stanley Way, Palo Alto) congratulated Mr. Burch as a member of Mid-Peninsula Community Media Center board for resolving that problem. He said that having it just across the street from City boundaries worked out well. Then he brought up conflicts between the City Council and Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), including what he termed a preemptive strike on the Ventura site. He stated that he was glad Mr. Tuomy was on this committee because he was on the right side of both the Media Center and Ventura site issues. Mr. Easter said he believed it was up to the City, and not PAUSD, to resolve the issue of playing fields. He then suggested to Mr. Benest that if there are 4,000 acres of land under City management, some of that land ought to be available for playing fields.

Mr. Barton asked Mr. Easter to conclude his remarks at this point, as they addressed an agenda item and were not appropriate under Oral Communications.

2. Approval of Minutes - April 10, 2003

Mr. Burch moved to approve the minutes from the April 10th meeting. Ms. Kishimoto seconded. They were approved without objection.

3. Playing Fields

Ms. Harrison said the Council gave City Staff direction during the run-up to this year's budget to present a long-term plan to implement the Community Report on Athletic Fields. City Staff plans to do this at the Capitol Improvement Plan meeting on May 20th. The Council has made athletic fields one of its top five infrastructure priorities and the School/City Liaison Committee has made it one of its top three priorities for the year. The three main issues the Liaison Committee has asked the City Staff to report on in regard to athletic fields are: the projected cost of the athletic fields project; the need for the District to maintain control of its land; and, as Mr. Tuomy had wanted to know, what the status was of the Mayfield site. She said Ms. Calvert would talk about the report, Mr. Dias would cover the issues of its implementation, and Mr. Benest would talk about the Mayfield site.

Mr. Benest began by saying that the City of Palo Alto has no right to the Mayfield site. The City had negotiated with PAUSD, Stanford, and the JCC on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to gain 51 years of community use of the Mayfield site. Once the JCC moved to the Sun site, Mr. Benest consulted the Council about continuing this agreement. During this discussion, it became clear that the City's main concerns were playing fields and housing. The Mayfield site may provide the opportunity to significantly impact the City's playing field situation. Stanford is aware of the City's interest in the site, but will not give the schools or community the use of the Mayfield site without some sort of business transaction. Discussions have been ongoing.

Mr. Barton said his understanding of Stanford's offer to the community was that the Jewish Community Center (JCC) could use the site as a community center in exchange for a transfer of development rights and he asked if this was on a one to one basis.

Mr. Benest said at that time, it was about 100,000 to 130,000 square feet, because this was what the JCC needed. The City has been talking with Stanford about having playing fields on the site along with a transfer of development rights. He said he had a meeting with the Weekly's editorial board. There was an assumption that the City had a right of some sort to the Mayfield site.

Mr. Barton said he understood that the deal was not complete.

Mr. Benest confirmed that nothing was complete. At the time, this was considered a permanent site for the JCC. The concept, however, is still there and there have been discussions about reactivating that sort of arrangement.

Mr. Barton then asked if a rezone be required once the deal was completed.

Mr. Benest said that was possible.

Mr. Barton asked if it would require a general plan just to rezone.

Mr. Benest said a development agreement would be necessary. If the Council decided this met the community's need, it would be assumed that as part of agreeing to the transaction, zoning would also be taken care of.

Mr. Barton asked if this site was on the City's housing element inventory.

Mr. Benest and Ms. Harrison said that it was not.

Mr. Burch said it was conceivable this could be done on a shorter-term basis.

Mr. Benest said Stanford understands that once a playing field is placed on the Mayfield site, a certain entitlement is assumed by users, thus creating a very long-term relationship.

Ms. Kishimoto said 80,000 square feet were approved for the Hanover site.

Mr. Benest said that originally the Hanover site was envisioned as part of this transfer of development rights. When it did not happen, Stanford made application to redevelop and it was approved. This was a separate development application.

Ms. Kishimoto said a portion of the MOU would take care of this as part of the GUP obligations for impact on community services.

Mr. Benest said that Stanford has been saying all along that there is minimal community service impact from Terman. The City, however, does not agree.

Ms. Kishimoto asked that the other explorations with Stanford, such as use of El Camino fields and the extension El Camino Park, be summarized.

Mr. Benest said a longer term use lease of El Camino Park was needed from Stanford in order to make major investments. He said there have been numerous discussions with Stanford about field use in general. The City has made it clear they want to cooperate. Stanford's position, though, is that the fields are constantly in use and this would be a tremendous conflict with the City's use. They are very concerned that the community would feel entitled to use of their fields any time. The other issue is that when the East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Palo Alto City Managers

got together, Palo Alto and Menlo Park, in particular, found that they have the same field use crisis. Menlo Park has talked about getting Stanford to help them as well.

Mr. Barton said that very early on in the discussions regarding opening a third middle school site, he had suggested sharing fields with Stanford, and the Stanford representatives said they were very concerned about their fields.

Mr. Benest said that at this point in time, he did not see the situation changing, so this will not be a realistic opportunity for the City. Investments, however, can still be made at El Camino Park.

Ms. Harrison said Ms. Calvert would now give a brief overview of the Community Report and Mr. Dias would discuss the implementation plan.

Ms. Calvert said the Park and Recreation Commission requested on October 23, 2001, that the Athletic Fields Advisory Committee be formed. This group was composed of approximately 20 representatives from the Palo Alto community. Their vision was: "To meet the high expectations of the community by providing playing fields to fully satisfy the year round needs of youth and adult sports organizations." They focused on two areas: synthetic sports turf and the use of lights. In the long term, they would like to develop at least one new athletic facility, possibly at Mayfield, Bixby, Baylands or elsewhere. They also want to nurture relationships with other community entities such as PAUSD and Stanford. The Commission and Council have approved a new City playing fields policy to fully support both youth and adult sports organization needs. The City Council has placed playing fields on its top five priority list and directed staff to create an action plan to implement solutions on an aggressive timeline, which is consistent with budgetary and other considerations, to deal with the immediate playing fields problems. The second phase includes addressing longer term solutions to the shortage of fields.

Mr. Dias spoke about the history of the playing field maintenance agreement between the City and the schools, beginning with Hays and Jordan, which has existed since 1996. This was expanded in 1999 to include all middle schools, resulting in greatly improved field conditions. As part of the shared partnership agreement, capital renovations on school sites have been implemented and the City has been very flexible in coordinating the maintenance and capital programs with the Building for Excellence program. As a result, despite increased use in the community, users are being provided with safer playing fields. First prioritizations for the City are City park sites, with no school sites being identified as top priorities at this time. These sites are Greer Park (two possible locations), El Camino Park, and possibly the Cubberley football field. These areas are being discussed because there is a lack of land and a lack of places for kids to play. It has been determined that for every field switching to artificial turf, perhaps \$20,000 can be saved in maintenance, water, etc. State grants, impact fees, and user fees are being considered as possible funding sources for the installation of the new turf. At this point, no costs are being projected for PAUSD because only City parks are currently

being looked at. In summary, Mr. Dias said he believed the partnership between the City and PAUSD has been beneficial to the schools and the community.

Ms. Harrison said that the point the City staff wanted to make was that they were pleased this committee had taken playing fields on as one of its three major priorities. This ties into the fact that the kids needing the playing fields are the same kids who are students at PAUSD. Therefore, it is in the School/City Liaison Committee's interests to make a place for recreation for kids, in addition to the adults of course.

Mr. Barton opened discussion at the table.

Ms. Kishimoto asked about the Baylands athletic fields.

Ms. Harrison reminded her that Ms. Calvert had described a Phase I, where existing sites would be improved and a Phase II where new sites would be developed.

Ms. Kishimoto asked Mr. Barton about the high schools.

Mr. Barton said that the way the joint use agreement works is that the City maintains the District's fields and can schedule late afternoon and early evening times on them. The problem with the high school fields is that the District has them constantly booked, so the City would get no time on them. He added that the high school fields are very small. He said the synthetic turf appeared to open new possibilities and wondered how much more the fields could be used. He observed that at the elementary schools, from a maintenance point of view, synthetic fields are great. From an expansion point of view, the fields are used for portables, and the synthetic turf, which would cost more than grass, would have to be torn up. He said the high school boosters are interested in lights, however this could be a very controversial topic in this community.

Ms. Harrison said the City is considering separating the synthetic turf and lighting issues for exactly this reason.

Mr. Barton said one issue the District has now is that if a night game is needed, Foothill College has to be used to accommodate the larger audience.

Dr. Callan said there are a number of school districts using synthetic turf on their football fields. There are also new lighting techniques that are more specific and less troublesome to neighbors.

Mr. Burch asked if it was primarily soccer fields that were needed.

Dr. Callan said the community's need included neighborhood pick-up games, etc. There are also other sports, such as lacrosse. She then pointed out that if all the community's fields are constantly scheduled, spontaneous pick-up games could not

occur, because there would be no room. She also mentioned the potential shifting of the opening time of high schools to 9 or 10 a.m. at some point in the future, and the effect of having all after school athletics in the evenings.

Mr. Burch asked about the possibility of having multiple adjoining fields that would create a complex thereby saving on maintenance.

Ms. Harrison said at this point there does not appear to be a possibility for a large sports complex, so the City is considering smaller opportunities as they arise.

Mr. Barton said he had spoken with a few people who suggested using a bond to buy land (such as the Elks site) on which to build an athletic complex.

Ms. Calvert said her committee had discussed this, but not in detail.

Mr. Dias said they also discussed short term uses, such as placing soccer fields on vacant parking lots or on top of parking garages.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if county or intercity agreements had been examined.

Mr. Dias said discussions with neighboring cities, including East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, are continuing.

Ms. Calvert said communication with the City of Menlo Park continues as they do research on field availability, so a connection may be made with them at some point in the future.

Ms. Kishimoto added that the Menlo Park group was looking at their bayland areas.

Mr. Dias said Menlo Park has their own set of problems with too many fields and not enough open space.

Ms. Harrison said that from a sustainability perspective, it is best to do the most one can with what one already has before trying to get more space to use. Changing to synthetic turf would have much less impact on the land, because it would entail using land already in use. There is also an environmental benefit in changing from a fertilized, watered turf to a synthetic one, because this makes much less impact on the land.

Ms. Kishimoto brought up the idea of a friends group, saying there are many parents who are interested in raising money for purposes such as this.

Ms. Harrison said a friends group doesn't need the City's authority and that the City would love to work with any group interested in fields.

Mr. Barton said he thought the City and the District could come together regarding the lighting of fields, noting that Paly and Gunn have both been very interested in lighting their fields.

Ms. Harrison said that if the District and the City could jointly decide on a type of lighting that is minimally intrusive or not intrusive at all, this would be a huge step.

Mr. Barton agreed and said he thought planning issues would also need to be looked at.

Ms. Harrison said it should be determined whether lighting falls under the City or the State Architect.

Mr. Burch asked what the next steps will be.

Mr. Dias said the City's next step, in light of the budget situation, involves just looking at City sites.

Mr. Burch suggested prioritizing projects and focusing on one at a time.

Ms. Calvert said the committee is branching off separately as a Political Action Committee (PAC) to reach out to the community and are going out on their own to do more in depth political action and search for funding.

Ms. Kishimoto said the City must be sensitive to traffic and noise situations in the neighborhoods.

Mr. Dias said this alternative sports field option is not right for all sites. It is really best for high-use sites and may not be appropriate for elementary and middle schools.

Mr. Benest added that this created some tough choices. It must be determined to what extent the City believes sports are important to families and whether or not they would be willing to make some trade-offs. Lights, open space, and Mayfield all need to be considered in relation to trade-offs. There are no absolute winners.

Dr. Callan asked Mr. Dias for elaboration on user fees.

Mr. Dias said user fees, which are charged to baseball league, soccer players, and so forth, could be increased. There may be an increased price to play at night using lights, for example.

Dr. Callan asked if the user fees currently cover costs.

Ms. Harrison said they did not, but increases in fees would be structured to cover the additional capital costs.

Dr. Callan asked if there were any models that break even.

Ms. Harrison said there is a long tradition of built-in subsidies for youth and children's sports. If user fees were to change, that policy would have to be considered.

Mr. Dias said that currently all fees are split 50/50 between the City and PAUSD.

Mr. Barton said his main concern is with the history of synthetic turf.

Mr. Dias said the best example is Burlingame's football field, which was installed five years ago. Injuries have been reduced and the history is good. The girls' soccer team had a few problems with knee burns, but the players started wearing knee pads and the problem was alleviated. In the past two years, there have been further improvements, including the addition of a pad under the turf. Sequoia High School and Menlo High School are currently installing the new turf. Everyone is very comfortable with it and there is enough history.

Mr. Burch said if this material was that good, one would think universities would be using it.

Mr. Barton said Seattle is putting it in and UC Berkeley is talking about installing it as well to reduce injuries and increase use time.

Mr. Dias said the NFL has not yet endorsed it. He said the new turf is padded and thick, so it is much better than the old astro turf, which is installed directly on concrete. He added that Valley Christian in San Jose has had it for eight or nine years.

Dr. Golton said he was coming to the Board next Tuesday with a proposal from the District's lessee, Pinewood School, which is renting the Fremont Hills facility. They would like to install field turf, like AstroPlay. He then listed many of the organizations in Northern California installing this type of artificial turf, including the City of Folsom, Sacred Heart Cathedral High School, Marin Academy, Peninsula Jewish Community Center, Valley Christian High School and the City of Danville.

Dr. Callan added that it is made from recycled Nike shoes.

Mr. Barton suggested that during the master planning of the high schools, playing fields be added to the scope, and that alternative locations for the fields be considered.

Dr. Golton said there were a few issues, including the one Mr. Barton brought up earlier that the synthetic turf would have to be installed in places that will never be used for portables. He also noted that many people prefer playing on real grass.

Ms. Harrison said that until the next meeting, everyone ought to consider solutions so they can be presented under the broad agenda item regarding solutions for all three of the major priorities established by the group at the last meeting.

Mr. Barton said it appears the high school football fields are good places to start, because they would never hold portables, and the boosters were interested in lighting. He suggested that education codes and municipal codes be examined regarding lighting.

Ms. Harrison said she hoped PAUSD and the City could work together to determine the type of lighting to be used in order to ensure that it will be minimally intrusive for neighbors of the fields.

Ms. Kishimoto observed that it seems Gunn has many more fields than Paly.

Mr. Barton said that when the boosters presented their master plan for Gunn, it was noted that the quality of fields at Gunn deteriorates as it gets farther from the school, one reason being that some of the land is federally owned and there are use issues. The cost to grade and improve drainage would be high, but it would be cheaper than buying land.

Dr. Callan said there is a master plan for a sports complex from Gunn boosters. At one point in time, a parent was going to donate it, but this has fallen through, due to the dot com decline. This land cannot be easily transformed and the cost will be considerable. The master plan included a swimming pool complex, soccer field, baseball field, etc. The cost was going to be in the millions to improve the property. The boosters from both high schools came to a board meeting a few months ago and said their first priority is fundraising for two pool complexes, which will total \$6 million.

Dr. Golton noted that the "All Schools Fund" had so far not made significant progress.

Dr. Callan added that at about the point the "All Schools Fund" began, the state budget difficulties were just coming to light.

Mr. Barton then asked if anyone from the community had any comments.

Mr. Easter said he believed Mr. Benest was right in that it was a matter of priorities and stated that this committee needs to set goals and priorities. The responsibility, he added, falls on the City, not PAUSD. If landfill will be filled in five years, as he has been told, the City will have to build a transfer site for refuse. At that time, the City can take that land, which it owns, and approach this landfill as a solution to the lack of fields. He also commented that he did not like the idea of buying the Elks Club and asked about affordable housing. He said planning must be made for this too,

because it is a City issue, though the assistance of PAUSD is needed as well. He said he was in favor of only low cost housing going in at the Elks and at the Hyatt and that he did not like the 12.5% to 15% discounted housing, but true affordable housing. Mayfield, for example has a problem with tunnels underneath, but it is still zoned for housing. A combination of affordable housing and fields would be a great use of the land. He suggested Mr. Benest focus on this in his conversations with Stanford.

4. Future Meetings and Agenda Items

Ms. Harrison said it had been discussed at the April meeting that measurable goals for all three priorities would be set up for the rest of the year at the June meeting.

Mr. Barton suggested June 11, 2003 at 9:00 a.m.

Ms. Harrison asked if there was anything that could be provided from the staff perspective to help structure the next meeting.

Mr. Barton suggested having a Police Department representative and school officers to help the group understand stress issues among students.

Ms. Harrison said these people could cover both school traffic and stress.

Adjournment at 10:27 a.m.