



City/School Liaison Committee Special Meeting Final Minutes



Special Meeting
September 17, 2020

Chairperson Collins called the meeting to order at 8:32 A.M. on this date via virtual teleconference.

Present: City of Palo Alto Representatives
Lydia Kou, Council Member
Greg Tanaka, Council Member
Chantal Cotton Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager
Monique LeConge Ziesenhenné, Assistant City Manager

Palo Alto Unified School District Representatives
Todd Collins, Board President (Chair)
Jennifer DiBrienza, Board Member
Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District

Oral Communications

None.

Minutes Approval

2. Approval of the August 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes.

MOTION: Council Member Kou moved, seconded by Board Member DiBrienza to approve the minutes as presented.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

3. Superintendent and City Manager Comments.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) remarked that the Palo Alto School Board was going to take action on September 29, 2020 regarding return dates for students. There were over 1,000 school districts in the State of California, and they were all being compared against one another. Palo Alto School District was having to

FINAL MINUTES

contend with districts like San Jose, which announced that all levels were not coming back until second semester. Palo Alto was a K-12 district, which meant when compared to a high school only district, where almost all students were returning at the semester, or elementary only districts were almost all coming back earlier, Palo Alto was responsible for both. It was hard explaining this to parents. The reality was Palo Alto was completely calibrated with surrounding school districts and counties. He reiterated that the decision was coming up soon and expected a lot of public comment. The issue was difficult because it dealt with practicality, safety, education and was also a collective bargaining issue, which were challenges not unique to Palo Alto.

Council Member Kou inquired regarding the comparison with other school districts and asked if a “best practice” was being compiled.

Mr. Austin clarified that other superintendents were calibrating with one another daily. They were not only looking at best practices but what they were able to get through the process. Parents, teachers and class staff were more likely to find a district that was doing what they wanted them to do and were pointing administrators in that direction, suggesting their example be carried out. This was what he meant by the comparisons being made. He illustrated by saying one parent compared schools opening to major league baseball opening. There were differences between the two, such as baseball did not have a competitor, they only had one collective bargaining team; there was no comparison.

Council Member Kou added that there were a lot of stake holders that had different opinions as well.

Mr. Austin agreed. He spoke with the City Manager often to exchange ideas and would ask questions like what City Hall looked like, how many employees were allowed in the building and how did he handle poor behavior at places like parks. It was tough and contradictions did not make things easier.

Council Member Kou inquired about the distance limit for students when they did come back to school and how he planned on expanding space.

Mr. Austin answered that, with all the safety protocols, the six-foot distance was not actually a requirement, it was a guideline and cohorts and masks were seen as more important. The six-foot distance was stuck in people’s minds, but for a lot of the protocols he put the clause “or the current

FINAL MINUTES

guideline” because the guidelines shifted frequently and dramatically at times.

Council Member Kou inquired about cohorts and asked if he was going to have to hire more teachers.

Mr. Austin said he was not going to have to hire more teachers and the cohort he was referring to was a stable group.

Council Member Tanaka wanted to know what the City could do to help with the school reopening.

Mr. Austin answered that if there were obvious contradictions to things that were safe, addressing that in some way was helpful. Having people point to things that were bad, such as people seeing little league practice taking place while at the same time having schools be closed. Secondly, there was a lot of talk about employee testing and if there was some way schools and the City could work together.

Council Member Tanaka agreed that was an obvious contradiction and said it was good to be in sync. Testing was also very important. The City had been relying on the County but thought the City could do more. A big part of the re-opening was either random or frequent testing.

Mr. Austin said the School District was in discussion with El Camino Hospital and Stanford Hospital and thought there was an opportunity for coordinated effort.

Council Member Tanaka reiterated the importance of being synced with the School District and wanted to support them. Regarding space utilization, he wondered if the School District was going to use Cubberley more.

Mr. Austin loved the Cubberley space, but it was very expensive, and it needed to be brought up to code. He was not able to expend much more on the Cubberley facility, without a significant improvement plan. Breaking the students up into a A/B schedule, where group A came to school one day, and group B came the next day was a popular suggestion in other districts.

Council Member Tanaka clarified there was a desire for the need for more square footage.

FINAL MINUTES

Mr. Austin said yes. It depended on how it was looked at, in terms of square footage or the ratio of students on campus; they adjusted the ratio by cutting the students in half.

Board Member DiBrienza interjected that they did not have more teachers, if they had more teachers then they would use double the space.

Chair Collins said their plan was not actually released yet but was going to be discussed next Tuesday, and the materials for that meeting were published the Friday before. A significant report for that meeting entailed the safety and re-opening plan. The School Board was not going to take action at that meeting but at another meeting the following Tuesday. This allowed time for community review and discussion.

Penny Ellson wanted to make sure the Superintendent emphasized safe commutes to schools on bicycles and on foot; she wanted that included in the information packet to parents. There were fewer bikes and fewer cars on the road, but the cars were moving faster. The pandemic presented particular issues, such as mask wearing and social distancing. Students needed light exercise before they started school.

Board Member DiBrienza understood that in last Friday's update there was detailed information released regarding Safe Routes to School. The Program was continuing, and they were partnering with the City to prepare for students came back.

Mr. Austin concurred and agreed that exercise helped in the learning process.

Monique LeConge Ziesenhenn, Assistant City Manager noted that the City shifted their Summer/Streets Program, the business support and activation of closed streets in order to uplift local activity. Families were making use of the outdoor dining. Libraries were continuing with curbside pickup but due to recent poor air quality reports, the service needed to be cancelled for a few days. Staff was investigating other options, such as opening lobbies to make it easier for people to retrieve materials. The return boxes were open at the Downtown Library and College Terrace Library only, in the hopes of getting materials back from folks in those neighborhoods and also Staff needed to quarantine the materials. There was a Nation wide Study with the Institute of Museum and Library Services to determine how long the virus lasted on printed materials. As a result, City materials were quarantined for 96 hours before they were made available to someone else. There was a Safe Routes

FINAL MINUTES

to School presentation planned in October 2020. Additionally, she noted the Corona Virus Report email update; this Report was also used to send out updates, such as the one about the libraries or testing locations. This City was still working with the County on their Pop-up Testing Program, which was by appointment. The feedback was positive. The online appointment capability was now going to be open a week before the testing site was setup.

Chair Collins heard positive reviews of the City and how they were handling things. He did not think the pandemic was going to last as long as it had.

4. Review of Recent City Council and PAUSD Board Meetings.

Council Member Kou relayed that at the last Council Meeting the Council approved an Interim Ordinance, in partner with the County, regarding the Safe Parking Program. There was a site approved at 2000 Geng Road, designated for Recreational Vehicle (RV) parking, it was a temporary spot leased by the County, for which the County was also providing case management services for people living in vehicles. Vice Mayor DuBois and herself submitted a Colleague's Memo regarding locating Safe Parking areas. They started by reviewing faith-based groups, but they were generally only allowing up to four cars and only allowed people to stay one night. This was a huge inconvenience because every morning families and RV's had to move to a different location. With this site approved in conjunction with the County, families were able to stay on site 24 hours, seven days a week. The goal of the Program was to transition people that were living in RV's into more stable or permanent housing. A second point of discussion was direction on the continuance of the Summer Streets Program, which Ms. Zieshenne mentioned. The Council also reviewed some of their State legislation and there were some disappointments, which were mainly in the area of policing (Senate Bill (SB) 776 and SB 731.) One of those Bills had to do with certification, such as an instance when an Officer committed a crime and the State was able to remove certification. The second Bill dealt with the opening of police records, so more people of the public were able to examine them. She felt those were all transparency and accountability Bills, but they did not pass. She encouraged the City to return to the law makers and show support for them; the School District was able to support that as well.

Council Member Tanaka reported that the Council voted to back the School Bond.

FINAL MINUTES

Chair Collins appreciated the Council endorsing their Parcel Tax, also known as Measure O. The School Board voted to put the Measure on the ballot. The Board was active on COVID-19 related items and received reports on the status of distance learning. Distance learning had severe limitations and did not serve all kids, but overall, it went pretty well. They did an extensive survey with almost 4,000 respondents after two weeks of distance learning and generally, the reviews were positive. This reflected the significant effort on the part of teachers and the schools to provide training. Virtually all teachers took additional training over the summer and all that effort was seen with the opening of the school year. There were definite limitations, one of the big ones was the change to largely synchronous learning, which meant teachers were live streaming with students over Zoom, which has led to Zoom Fatigue. They were constantly reforming some of the practices and trying to take breaks to ensure they addressed some of the weak spots. Another update was the mega safety plan was coming out Friday related to the school re-opening. There was a lot of work done to make the facilities safe; there was something like 600 people in their facilities every day.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) said yes, and they added childcare and other employees to the number. There were about 800 people at their facilities on any given day right now.

Chair Collins remarked that most people had the sense that school was closed, but that was not the case. As a result, they needed robust safety practices. The campuses had signage, distance markers, cleaning schedules, etc. to make sure the facilities were safe for use. This made things clear and gave people confidence that the facilities were safe. Another update was the budget. While it was mostly good news, it was mostly sobering news as well. The good news was that due to much of the closure of the economy, there was not as much money spent and they ended up with a windfall of about \$10 million. Much of that money was deferred, such that vendors that were signed up to do work last fiscal year and their work got delayed, were deferred to the next fiscal year. There were no lay-offs, so the personnel expenses (roughly 85 percent of the budget) were the same. A lot of the \$10 million surplus was going to be used as the services that were rendered for it: the good news stopped there. The schools were headed into a difficult period where there was a lot of headwind on Property Taxes. They received their first update from the Assessor's Office, but the Assessor's Office was backlogged nine times what the average number of assessment challenges usually were. This meant people were assessing their properties, which he assumed was the result of downward pressure on Property Taxes. Property Taxes were a major source of revenue for PAUSD. The School Board was anticipating their 3.5 percent growth might end up being optimistic.

FINAL MINUTES

Although the long term was unknown, he anticipated robust increases in Property Taxes going forward. State income and revenue was under a great deal of pressure, schools were protected this year, but he was not sure if that was going to continue in future years. The School Board was really looking at their revenue sources as uncertain, and their five-year forecast was in the red. This was due to roll over expense budgets and no increases in staff compensation; the Schools were in the red to begin with. All of these budget assumptions were assuming Measure O was renewed. If Measure O was not renewed, the impact was going to be \$60 million per year.

Board Member DiBrienza concurred \$60 million.

Chair Collins added that was over five years and meant it cleared every reserve they had. Some people felt PAUSD was over-reserved, but it was hard to feel that way. There needed to be significant changes in their expense budget to reflect the loss of the Parcel Tax revenue if they were not able to retain it. Most of their budget updates were lagged, compared to the City's, but they were anticipating the next two or three fiscal years to be fiscally challenging.

Board Member DiBrienza said all the time the schools were not open, they were not getting the normal rent income they relied on and every day they were not open and not serving kids that were paying full price for their lunch, the cost was \$14,000 per day, and that was just for free reduced lunch. The School Board continued to get reports, such as Title 9 updates, test scores releases, Public Records Act information and the five-week progress report for high schoolers. Most of their conversation revolved around COVID-19.

Council Member Tanaka was interested in the Property Tax update and thought it was interesting getting the update from the school side of things. In his conversations with community members, a lot of residents were laid off, so he was not surprised donations were down. There were a handful of companies that were doing well, but most of them were not and a lot of companies instituted cost reduction measures that were impacting people. Property Taxes were a big part of the City's Budget and the Council received a Sales Tax Report as well, and it was bad. Palo Alto was in bad shape, even relative to other cities. It was going to be tough for both organizations, so they needed to work together.

Chair Collins concurred that both the City and PAUSD relied on Property Taxes. He noted a difference in the way the City handled the Property Tax

FINAL MINUTES

update, versus the way PAUSD did and sometimes the forecasts were different. He wondered why the two agencies had different reports based off the same information. It was a good practice on both sides to get into contact with their counter part and talk about what each agency heard from the Assessor's Office. Doing this gave both the elected officials and the community more confidence and if they were not the same, they knew why.

5. COVID-19 Coordination Update.

Monique LeConge Ziesenhenné, Assistant City Manager remarked that COVID-19 was regularly on the Agenda since March 2020. The City Manager and the Superintendent of Schools spoke about various activities. She wanted to follow up with the City School Liaison Committee (Committee) once they released their Safety Report as she was interested in the signage. It was important for the City to do something similar to the Schools. At this point, many City Staff were working from home and were also experiencing Zoom Fatigue, but the City was open for business, the different departments were offering assistance either virtually or by appointment. Staff discussed testing for employees, they were investigating different options, such as mobile options so Staff were able to come to different sites. There was also the possibility of working with different health care providers. There were various opportunities through insurance providers as well as funds from other locations.

Chair Collins remarked that the City had not historically had signage at their facilities. Community members received comfort when Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) and the City coordinated. People implicitly compared the two government agencies and when the two were different it was hard for people to understand. This was a situation where the two agencies were able to inspire confidence in the community.

Ms. Ziesenhenné confirmed that the City had signage. She observed there were different rules in place for educational facilities, which caused confusion with the public. She agreed that following the same model, as much as they could, was good.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District promised to send the City a revised draft of their Safety Policy. The schools received a lot of their influence from Stanford University, so if the City modeled after PAUSD's standard, the three were pretty much the same.

FINAL MINUTES

Council Member Kou observed the City was different from the schools, like the example of the cleaning chart being signed off every time a room was cleaned. That cleaning schedule was possibly good for parts of City Hall, but there was not an extensive need for that. She made up her own signs and passed them out to community members. She suggested that when Safe Routes to School was mentioned that there be some police presence.

Chair Collins agreed. Most people did not know what a School Resource Officer (SRO) was but there were none now. As a result, there were no Police Officer's dedicated to schools. To the extent that the Police were involved in PAUSD's operations, there was a need to step up the coordination because the police response was done by a different person each time there was a response.

Council Member Kou remarked that the SRO was trained for that particular assignment.

Council Member Tanaka left the meeting at 9:29 AM

6. Updates on Ongoing Matters.
 - a. Cubberley Update
 - b. Connecting Palo Alto (Grade Separations)

Kristen O'Kane, Director of the Community Services Department remarked that the City and School District Staff continued to work closely to understand how they were going to work together since the lease changed. Even though the City was separate, there was a lot of interconnectivity at Cubberley, such as the systems and how they functioned and worked. There were systems that worked in the entire building, the City systems were not separate from the School District's system, so they had to work together to keep things functioning. She recently had the first regular monthly meeting with Staff and remarked that it was a good opportunity for the two entities to come together for discussion. Having the staff meetings made communication easier. She had been navigating through the new arrangement and how the two were able to be successful and were able to keep the facility up and running.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) thought both sides underestimated how much of the shared space was going to include cross-over. There were things that were broken and deteriorated, which was harder to solve now. There needed to be decisions about what needed to be fixed and that process was not going to be easy.

FINAL MINUTES

Ms. O'Kane agreed.

Chair Collins noted there were infrastructure problems beyond what PAUSD anticipated. It was an old facility and until it was inspected it was hard to tell what needed to be fixed. These issues underscored the notion to not redevelop Cubberley. There was a common notion that the facility was old and just needed a little paint, but it was hard to tell what needed fixing and what could wait. Eventually the infrastructure repairs needed to be made and often that led to more remodeling and redevelopment because one repair led to another. The facility was pushed past its useful life. Decisions about the future of Cubberley needed to be discussed. There was a mechanism put in place as part of the proposed lease where the two entities created a joint Ad Hoc Committee which included two School Board Members and two City Council Members with the goal of working on the issues and the next steps. The School District appointed their members to that group but the City, perhaps because of the pandemic, never staffed the Committee. Now, there were COVID-19 related items that took precedence; he suggested the City Staff the Committee, so the two agencies were able to come together for the future redevelopment of Cubberley. He thought this was important, to the extent that the City had breathing space. The School District still had their Committee Members appointed from January 2020 and were able to proceed as soon as the City was. The only path forward for Cubberley was redevelopment.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager noted she was not assigned to Grade Separation at this time, so her update came from the Office of Transportation. Recently, there was a Virtual Town Hall meeting regarding Grade Separation. Pre-COVID-19 there were Town Hall meetings planned but those had to be readjusted. There was a Virtual Town Hall meeting from August 19 to September 14, 2020. It was open a week later than the original deadline, in terms of receiving feedback from people. Staff did not have all the data back yet, but they had about 1,000 visitors to the Virtual Town Hall meeting and they received over 600 Feedback Forms. Having organized Town Hall meetings in the past, that was significant feedback. In the past, they had between 150-200 people participate in in-person Town Hall meetings. The virtual Town Hall was great in terms of expanding the opportunity for people to weigh in. In terms of process, the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) was going to provide the Council with an update on Monday, September 21, 2020. The XCAP was currently deliberating on Grade Separation options on all three locations and were expected to provide their final Report in October 2020. Following the XCAP final Report and the Council direction, Staff was going to finalize the

FINAL MINUTES

Project Study Report either at the end of 2020 or early 2021. The Staff Report for Monday, September 21, 2020 was published.

Council Member Kou noted that at one of the last XCAP meetings they took a vote to close Churchill Avenue.

Chair Collins confirmed that was an advisory vote by the XCAP.

Council Member Kou said yes and clarified the XCAP's vote was a recommendation to the City Council.

Chair Collins felt pedestrian and bike traffic needed to be given the same level of consideration as vehicle traffic. The vast majority of students walked and biked to school. When crossings were closed and traffic was re-routed, the implications needed to be viewed with existing bike and pedestrian traffic. He understood that if Churchill Avenue was closed there were going to be more cars on Embarcadero Road. Embarcadero Road was a major route used to get to Palo Alto High School. He wanted to make sure these points were given equal consideration and study.

Ms. Gaines promised to pass that message on to the Transportation Department. The mitigations the Transportation Department looked at always included keeping bike and pedestrian access at Churchill Avenue.

Penny Ellson was disappointed, especially where there were no grade crossings for cars or pedestrians and that there was no feasible plan that separated bicycles from car traffic on Alma Street. Given the cost and scale of this project, it surprised her that bike and pedestrian improvements were not included in the plans, given the number of students that crossed East Meadow Drive and that bicycled to school across a multi-lane expressway with fast moving traffic. There was a crossing guard during school hours, but many students participated in after school activities and there was no crossing guard then. The set of plans in place were developed around motor vehicle operations, and the bicycle and pedestrian improvements were added at the last minute and were not reviewed by the City/School Traffic Safety Committee. She did not see that this project provided bicycle and pedestrian safety for kids as of right now.

Chair Collins added that the timing was difficult because the community was largely consumed by COVID-19 related issues since March 2020. This process went forward with a very distracted community, including having the process be incredibly complicated. He thought when the project was going to

FINAL MINUTES

come to fruition and the proposals were being discussed, there was a possibility that the school community was going to realize the plan did not meet their needs. This was going to create challenges because the City was going to need to reach out for financing and this could affect that. He did not know how to anticipate the needs of that community, especially since they were still distracted, and schools were going to be open in three weeks. He suggested engaging the school community and incorporating the fact that there was possibly going to be significant new stake holders weighing in late in the process.

Future Meetings and Agendas

Chair Collins said historically the City School Liaison Committee (Committee) rolled over these items because most Agenda Items were ongoing.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager had a list of items that were of interest to the Committee, such as: 1) a request for an update on the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP); 2) Safe Routes to School presentation; 3) Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Communications Council; and 4) update on programs the City was still offering for teens.

Monique LeConge Ziesenhenné, Assistant City Manager added that Staff was also asked to do a comparison on what budget items were paid out from the City to the School District and a suggested discussion on Property Tax and why the School District and the City calculate that differently.

Chair Collins requested to have the list written down and to have it circulated to the Committee to weigh in on what they wanted to do over the next few months.

Ms. Gaines said yes.

Board Member DiBrienza recalled Ms. Gaines mentioned the PTA Committee, and she wondered if that was in regard to public and private PTA groups.

Ms. Ziesenhenné clarified there was a referral for an Agenda Item regarding using the PTA communications for City communications in connection with testing for COVID-19 or something similar.

FINAL MINUTES

Council Member Kou was contacted by a consortium called Allcove through the County and they planned on opening a drop-in Teen Center in Palo Alto; she suggested having them do a presentation before the Committee.

Ms. Ziesenhenne also recalled a presentation regarding Project Safety Net moving to a non-profit status tied in with a teen update. She planned on adding Allcove to Future Agendas.

Chair Collins knew the person in charge of Allcove and could assist with this Item if needed. He agreed to having Allcove and Project Safety Net on a future Agenda.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 9:52 A.M.