



City/School Liaison Committee Special Meeting Minutes



Special Meeting
March 25, 2021

Chairperson Burt called the meeting to order on this date in virtual teleconference at 8:31 A.M.

Present: City of Palo Alto Representatives
Patrick Burt, Vice Mayor
Greg Tanaka, Council Member, arrived at 9:50 A.M.
Chantal Gaines, Deputy City Manager, Staff Liaison

Palo Alto Unified School District Representatives
Jennifer DiBrienza, Board Member
Shounak Dharap, President
Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District

Absent:

Oral Communications

Rebecca Eisenberg shared that other jurisdictions have helped their school districts with resources and legal resources to help the school districts come into compliance with various laws. She mentioned that Palo Alto schools are not as open as other jurisdictions which is resulting in high levels of mental health issues among kids.

Minutes Approval

2. Approval of Minutes From December 17, 2020 and February 18, 2021 Meetings.

Chair Burt asked if the December 17, 2020 minutes can be approved by Committee Member who were not on the Committee at that time.

Board Member DiBrienza believed that the new Committee Members should not vote on them. She inquired if herself and Council Member Tanaka can approve them or if a majority vote is needed.

Chair Burt predicted that a majority vote is needed.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Board President Dharap indicated that he would review the video and the minutes for December 17, 2021. Then they can be approved at the next meeting.

MOTION: Chair Burt moved, seconded by Board Member DiBrienza to approve the February 18, 2021 minutes.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

3. Superintendent's Comments and City Manager's Comments.

Don Austin, Superintendent of Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), reported that all hybrid students are returning to full in-person teachings in the elementary grades. PAUSD is the most open school district in the entire region. He agreed that the 3-foot social distancing requirement has helped schools to return to in-person teachings. He noted that for the 2021-2022 school year, with the 3-foot requirement, there will be no issue opening all the schools for all grades.

Ed Shikada, City Manager stated that the City will be moving to the Orange Tier soon. Indoor activities will begin at several libraries but they will be limited in capacity. Testing has been increased for community members and is available at the City Hall Plaza. City Council has recently passed a resolution about anti-Asian hate crimes and tied to that is training for all Boards and Commissions and raising awareness of inclusion.

Chair Burt continued to think that the School District downplays the great work that has happened in terms of the physical changes they have done to classrooms and air quality. He encouraged the School District to continue to share all those changes with the community.

Board President Dharap shared that Governor Newsom visited the schools and has declared that PAUSD is the school district that other school districts in the state should model their reopening plan after.

Rebecca Eisenberg disagreed with the statement that PAUSD is the most open district. She agreed with Chair Burt that the district has made great strides in improving the buildings. She requested that Chair Burt meet with the School District to discuss financing strategies that can be used for future building improvements.

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

- a. CITY: Recent City Agendas Recap.
- b. PAUSD: Recent Board Agendas Recap.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Board Member DiBrienza restated that hybrid elementary students will be returning to in-person teachings 5-days a week. In terms of secondary schools, the schools are waiting to see how many kids returned before opening the schools to full in-person teachings. The School District has entered into a contract with a company to conduct Staff and student COVID-19 testing. Considering the City's efforts regarding equity, the School Board has formed a Board Equity Committee to fill the gaps other equity work has missed. The Free Lunch Program has been extended through the end of summer/beginning of fall. Discussions continue on how to spend the one-time funding that the City and the School District have received through the federal relief packages.

Board President Dharap added that the Board Equity Committee will be collaborating with the City's Human Relations Committee (HRC) to move forward on equity concerns.

Chair Burt asked if the School District has preliminary estimates of how the latest federal relief funds will be used.

Board President Dharap confirmed that the School Board has reviewed the school's budget assumptions as well as reviewed the one-time federal grants it will receive. The School Board discussed how those funds can be spent to make changes that are sustainable for years to come as well as provide essential items to students to help facilitate their learning.

Chair Burt shared that Council has been discussing the Castilleja School expansion proposal. In terms of the grade separation project, the Council has had one meeting thus far with another meeting to act on the project to be held in April of 2021. He mentioned that the Expanded Community Advisory Committee (XCAP) has recommended that Churchill Avenue be closed to vehicular traffic with expansion of bicycle and pedestrian crossing capabilities. Those crossings are proposed to be at Seale Avenue and Churchill Avenue. In preparation of the City moving to the Orange Tier, the City has been working on up grades that enhance the air quality in City facilities as well as how to encourage civic and cultural participation.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Deputy City Manager suggested Chair Burt review the Community Economic Recovery program.

Chair Burt mentioned that the City has seen a large decrease in it's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) and Sale Tax. The TOT is the primary funding source for an increase in the City's capital projects beyond the traditional baseline level. Council has been discussing and will continue to discuss more strategic budgetary changes that will affect the next several years.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Rebecca Eisenberg noted that Council has discussed dropping the third stage of bicycle improvements for South Palo Alto. She expressed concern that the School District was not given a chance to respond to that concept prior to the Council meeting. She concluded that the School Board is currently in a lawsuit regarding an Asian student who was brutally bullied and that the School District is not willing to settle on the matter.

Ed Shikada, City Manager specified that Council did not act to eliminate the third phase of bicycle improvement for South Palo Alto. Council instructed Staff to find a \$2.5 million savings in all 18 Capital Improvement Projects but there is no plan to differ any of the projects at this time.

Chair Burt added that the City anticipates receiving \$12 million from the federal relief bill.

5. City and Schools Collaborations (Initial Discussion).

Chair Burt explained that the document provided to the City/School Liaison Committee is to be used to initiate discussion. He encouraged input from the Committee on the context of the document, if a mission statement is needed, and the topics within the document.

Board Member DiBrienza specified that the Committee did work on a mission statement already.

Chair Burt responded that previous work on a mission statement was for the Committee and not the City/School collaborations.

Board Member DiBrienza stated that the School District, in working closely with the Human Relations Commission, will move forward the social equity initiatives. She requested City input regarding students who live in the safe parking lots and their transportation to school. She felt that the list is very comprehensive.

Chair Burt noted that the City does hope to expand and provide more safe parking lots as well as Santa Clara County is providing social services.

Board Member DiBrienza requested input from the City regarding the Cubberley Center collaboration and if the City/School Liaison Committee will be deferring all Cubberley discussions to the Cubberley Ad Hoc Committee.

Chair Burt believed that the Cubberley Ad Hoc Committee will be the body to handle all Cubberley work.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Rebecca Eisenberg appreciated the comments regarding expanding the safe parking programs as well as the need to assist the growing population of unhoused and vehicle dwellers. She urged the City to apply for funding from the Home Key Program. She shared that LifeMoves has indicated interest in creating in Palo Alto temporary homeless shelters. She declared it is very important to have the School District be involved in the Castilleja School expansion project.

Chair Burt suggested that the Committee take each topic one at a time. He shared that the City has approved an initial study for bicycle improvements on East Meadow Drive and Fabian Way. He disclosed that the City over the years has used its bulk traffic calming resources on traffic calming on the Safe Routes to School routes. Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the City was forced to eliminate the City's shuttle system which was used heavily by school children.

Board President Dharap expressed that the School Board will have to discuss the elimination of the City's shuttle buses.

Chair Burt confirmed that the City lost the Caltrain Grant for the shuttle system. He shared that transportation agencies have received large amounts of funding from the federal relief packages, and he predicted that the City may have opportunities to solicit for funding. He shared that now that he sits on the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Board, he plans to advocate for funding for a local shuttle program that the community and the school district can use.

Board Member DiBrienza encouraged Chair Burt to strongly advocate for funding for transportation, but she predicted that the School Board will be discussing the topic at length. She wondered why teen leadership was listed under transportation.

Chair Burt mentioned that it is a typo.

Board Member DiBrienza asked if Project Safety Net will be completely independent from the City once they become a non-profit.

Chair Burt confirmed that the City will continue to provide funding, but the City will not be providing Staff resources.

Ed Shikada, City Manager concurred with Chair Burt's explanation.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Deputy City Manager noted that Director O'Kane is on the Board for Project Safety Net.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Board Member DiBrienza appreciated the City's continued support for middle school athletics and she encouraged the City to explore expanding the program due to its popularity.

Chair Burt mentioned that many of the topics listed in the document have cross overs with many City projects. He asked for more information regarding crossing guards.

Mr. Shikada disclosed that the City is paying for crossing guards but there has been a reduction in that program.

Chair Burt believed that these topics are one of the important topics that warranted follow-up discussion. He predicted that further discussions regarding financial responsibilities for certain programs will need to happen. In terms of recreation, he wanted to look at additional opportunities utilizing the School District's playing fields. He inquired of Staff if there are any current issues or future issues that the Committee should be discussing.

Kristen O'Kane, Director of Community Services reported that the City has just renewed the contract between the City and the School District in terms of field sharing. In terms of middle school athletics, she explained that kids are only allowed to participate in the program that is associated with the school they attend. Staff continues to discuss if the program should be restructured. She noted that the City funds elementary music programs, arts, dancing schools, theater, and science programming.

Board Member DiBrienza requested that the Committee discuss programs that the City funds for school aged kids.

Ms. O'Kane disclosed that Staff will provide a summary for the Committee.

Chair Burt supported that recommendation. He mentioned that the Junior Museum and Zoo will be opening soon. He wanted to see an in-depth discussion on the middle school playing fields because he has concerns about the program being portrayed as an after-school program for the schools. His other concern was making sure that the programs have equity among all the students. He asked if the program is cost recovery.

Ms. O'Kane confirmed that it is close to cost recovery. She concurred that there should be a discussion about the programs and possibly having the School District investigate establishing an athletics booster program that would support the sports programs.

Chair Burt mentioned that his understanding is that the sports programs should be following the same model as the high school's athletic programs.

SUMMARY MINUTES

He wanted to see the program morph into a program that is both more compliant to the current legal mandates and more inclusive.

Board President Dharap suggested that the School Board and the City each draft a matrix that shows where there are areas of overlap and the amount of funding that each body provides. After discussion about the matrixes, he suggested that the topics be prioritized monthly.

Chair Burt supported that suggestion.

Ms. Gaines noted that because this is a special meeting, Staff may need a little more time to prepare the City's matrix.

Board Member DiBrienza confirmed that the School Board will not be meeting until April of 2021 and appreciated having extra time to work on the School Board's matrix.

6. Update on Ongoing Matters:
 - a. Grade Separation (Rail Crossings) Update.

Chair Burt invited Mr. Bhatia to provide a report on how the grade separation discussion relates to the School District.

Ripon Bhatia, Senior Engineer of the Transportation Department restated that Council has received and is reviewing the Expanded Community Advisory Panel's (XCAP) recommendation. He encouraged the School District to provide any feedback they have on the project. In the interim, the City is moving forward with safety improvements at the Alma Street and Churchill Avenue crossing.

Board Member DiBrienza asked if the School District had representation on the XCAP.

Chair Burt confirmed that there was one member from the School District but that member could not continue to the end of the XCAP. He mentioned that XCAP has recommended that several entities, including Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), be involved in the process moving forward. He emphasized that each grade crossing will have multiple years of disruption and be potentially closed for years during construction. The grade separation project and the North Venture Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP) has elevated the need for a bicycle and pedestrian crossing at Loma Verde Avenue. The City is investigating if Measure B funding can be used for those improvements.

Council Member Tanaka left the meeting at 10:00 A.M.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Future Meetings and Agendas

Board President Dharap requested that the City and the School Board confirm that all discussions regarding the Cubberley Community Center will be handled by the Cubberley Ad Hoc Committee. Also, how long will those discussions be held with the Cubberley Ad Hoc Committee.

Chair Burt requested a follow-up discussion on how the City and the School District are handling the reopening of the City and schools.

Ed Shikada, City Manager mentioned that the City is updating the Housing Element and there is a designee position open for the School District.

Chair Burt disclosed that he will add the Housing Element update to the comprehensive collaboration list.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Deputy City Manager confirmed that several parents from the district have applied to be on the advisory committee in drafting the updated Housing Element.

Board Member DiBrienza asked what position does the designee have to hold within the School District for the Housing Element update.

Ms. Gaines believed the position is for a School Board Member but she will double-check that.

Board President Dharap shared that at the next School Board meeting the appointment for that position had been determined.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 10:06 A.M.