



School/City Liaison Committee Minutes



School/City Liaison Committee Meeting Wednesday, March 23, 2005

8:15 AM to 9:45 AM
Palo Alto Unified School District
District Office Conference Room A
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto

In Attendance:

City of Palo Alto

Dena Mossar, City Council Member
Yoriko Kishimoto, City Council Member
Steve Emslie, Palo Alto Planning Dept
Emily Harrison, Asst. City Manager
Gayle Likens, Palo Alto Transportation Dept
Donald Piana, Palo Alto Community Services Dept
Lt. Mark Venable, Palo Alto Police Dept

Palo Alto Unified School District

Gail Price, Board of Education
Fran Codispoti, Gunn Parent
Ann Crichton, Ohlone PTA
Kathy Durkin, PAUSD Transportation Supervisor
Jerry Matranga, Business Services
Ron Smith, Facilities Project Manager
Karen Sundback, Gunn PTA

The meeting convened at 8:20 a.m.

It was decided that the Gunn athletic field item would be moved before the shuttle program item.

1. Oral Communications

None

2. Approval of Minutes – February 23, 2005

Ms. Mossar moved to approve, Ms. Kishimoto seconded.

3. Gunn Athletic Fields

Fran Cosipoti, a parent of a Gunn Alumnus, said her partner, Bob Cranmer-Brown, also a parent of a Gunn alumnus, could not be there today. She then introduced Matt McGinn, the new Athletic Director at Gunn. In her presentation to the Committee, she described a potential partnership between the District and the City. She explained that in 1998 the Sports Boosters determined the athletic fields at Gunn needed to be renovated. They hired VBN to develop a variety of plans to choose from. The plan the Sports Boosters decided on was subsequently approved by the Board of Education. The plan is that the mound of dirt in the corner of the property be cleared away and replaced with a new soccer field. Last night Ms. Codispoti and Mr. Cranmer-Brown made a presentation to the City's Parks and Recreation Commission, which gave its full support for this project. So far an all weather track costing \$350,000 had been installed four years ago. The parents raised \$300,000 of this cost and the District paid the rest. The second project of the Sports Boosters' three-phase plan involved \$84,000 in renovations on the drainage and sprinkler systems. The third phase would involve the addition of a 50 meter pool, a gymnasium, and a soccer field in the aforementioned unused corner of land at Gunn. Ms. Codispoti then stated this was the reason she was coming to the School/City Liaison Committee this morning. She wanted to find out what might be possible for a City/School District venture for a new pool and soccer field. One question that had arisen was the cost of heat. The Boosters believed heating the old pool may actually be more costly than the new one would be. Covering the new pool was also being discussed in order to save energy. Volunteers were looking at potential rental income from a pool. For example, a local swim team currently using the slightly smaller pool at Foothill College might be able to use this new bigger pool for swim meets. Stanford might also be able to use this new pool. A 50 meter x 25 yard pool gives a lot of flexibility. It would also allow more of the Gunn teams more practice time. Ms. Codispoti said it was important to share ideas with all involved groups, such as the City Council. The architect's plans would cost \$250,000, with \$215,000 raised in parent donations so far. The work on the track field was done rather inexpensively because alumni gave good prices and volunteered. The bottom line was that if a joint venture could occur, it must be remembered that Gunn was an education institution and its students must come first in usage of this new pool. She had also discussed this with Jerry Matranga, who shared his experiences from other districts. He said one thing that made ventures like this successful was when members of both entities got together in a small committee and planned all the parameters and restrictions ahead of time. Ms. Codispoti recommended this be done now. Last night at the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, Jeff Morton asked who would pay for all this and whether the parents would be contributing. Ms. Codispoti said that of course the parents would be helping and that they had already paid for the track renovation, among other things. Before the pool has been built, it would cost \$250,000 for the architect's planning before it went to the State. The parents had now raised \$215,000 toward this cost. Also, adding the soccer field in

the corner would be a quick and simple way of easing some of the pressure the City and District had been experiencing for more fields. She then restated that the Boosters had managed to accomplish so much in part because alumni had contributed the services of their companies to these projects. These people had already offered their services for this new project.

Ms. Mossar asked what happened to the idea of housing in the corner where the soccer field was proposed.

Ms. Price said this had been discussed about three years ago and that it had faded away. She did not believe the District should be providing housing and that the land should be for educational use.

Ms. Codispoti said she and Bob Cranmer-Brown are part of the Housing Options for Teachers (HOT) group which helps teachers find affordable housing in the area.

Ms. Price commended Ms. Codispoti and everyone involved in the HOT project, then asked about funding and whether Ms. Codispoti was asking for funding from the City for the field project.

Ms. Codispoti said there appeared to be a misunderstanding. This partnership would include some of everything. It would include part of the planning, part of the support, and part of the financing. This would be a good way for the District and the City to work together for the community, since the District had a space for a field and community members were asking the City for more soccer fields. She added that the Parks and Recreation Commission also stressed health, and adding more fields was obviously a wonderful way for community members to stay healthy.

Ms. Price said there were examples in Sunnyvale of City/School collaborations like this.

Ms. Codispoti said Mr. Matranga had experiences of this sort in Cupertino, Sunnyvale, and San Jose, and added that planning, however, was key. Every detail should be discussed before presenting the joint plan to the community. The Palo Alto community is very interested in getting more fields. Someone had actually come to her to suggest they would help build the new pool if they would install the new soccer field.

Ms. Mossar said she had watched the video tape of the previous night's Commission meeting. She said the timing for the golf course field was many years away because of flood control issues. In terms of having soccer fields today, this was not a solution from her perspective. The Sports Boosters' proposal was a very interesting opportunity about which she felt very positive. In addition, the City was staying away from scheduling youth play on high school fields, because it seemed to be discouraged by the District. She then questioned who would actually be using this new field at Gunn and what the City's interest would be in this.

Ms. Codispoti said this all needed to be worked out before presenting this to the community and actually beginning the project.

Ms. Mossar said Ms. Codispoti certainly had her support in moving forward and that she hoped something beneficial for everyone would come out of this.

Ms. Codispoti said two people volunteered to represent the Parks and Recreation Commission in discussions on this project.

Ms. Kishimoto thanked Ms. Codispoti for bringing this forward and asked how many acres were being discussed.

Mr. Sarouhan said the triangle area was seven acres and that a regulation size soccer field needed 92,000 square feet.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if a ballpark figure was being looked at for both the pool and the soccer field.

Ms. Codispoti said that both grass and "field turf" were being considered for the soccer field. Looking at ten year projections, field turf appeared to be the more economical decision. Regarding the pool, they had a figure now, but that cost reduction was still being considered. At this point they only knew the planning phase for the pool would cost \$253,000. It was hoped that the planning phase could start soon, then the total cost of construction could be determined once the plans were completed. There was already a fundraising committee in place working with major donors.

Ms. Kishimoto asked how the size of the Gunn pool compared with that of the Paly pool.

Ms. Codispoti said that about two or three years ago, Paly and Gunn were told to fundraise together so each could get a 50 meter pool. Paly had some generous donors come forward who would only donate if a pool could be built immediately. Those donations would only cover the cost of a 35 meter pool, so Paly went ahead with this. Gunn had not decided to go this route.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if solar heating was being considered.

Ms. Codispoti said all methods of heating were being considered. She said that last night Anne Cribbs had said that not building a 50 meter pool now would be a missed opportunity for Gunn's future.

Ms. Codispoti said the triangle area was a good location, since the Veteran's Hospital parking lot bordered it on one side; while on the other side, houses were separated from it by trees, which would help cut down on noise. This neighborhood

had been quite helpful when pipes were being put down for irrigation on the previous project and the Boosters had hand-delivered notices first as a courtesy.

Ms. Mossar said it would be interesting to explore weekend use of the Veteran's Hospital parking lot, since the area where the field would be was so far away from Arastradero. She also said that, as Ms. Codispoti noted the previous evening, this neighborhood was quite sensitive to traffic issues.

Ms. Codispoti said Ms. Cribbs did not believe the soccer field was very far from the rest of the campus and that there were paths to the area, so people could park on Gunn property if the hospital parking lot was not available.

Ms. Price then asked what next steps would be.

Ms. Codispoti said research was continuing and that they hoped to arrive at a cost for both projects soon. The Boosters also hoped a small group of people from the City, such as the two volunteers from last night's meeting, would help.

Ms. Price said the School Board would also be looking into this further.

Ms. Mossar said it was wonderful that the Boosters had gone to the Parks and Recreation Commission and the School/City Liaison Committee with this idea. She was uncomfortable, however, about the idea that the Parks and Recreation Commission might be out negotiating on behalf of the City. The City was not in a position to be at the table until there had been more discussion and a policy agreement had been reached.

Ms. Codispoti said the two City volunteers had offered to help with research and evaluation only.

Ms. Mossar said this was not an official City action.

Ms. Price said at this point, the concept needed to be further defined. The volunteers were essentially community members who happened to be on the Commission. There had not been a political decision or administrative staff associated with this at this point. More research needed to be done and it ought to be determined what type of partnership was feasible.

Ms. Codispoti said research was continuing by the Sports Boosters and it would be great to have other information brought in from the outside. She also said that Dan Sarouhan and Ron Smith of PAUSD had been of great assistance in giving direction and costs.

Ms. Price said this was really important and that the City clearly needed more information in order to make a decision about being engaged directly in planning and

potentially funding this project. She suggested Ms. Codispoti and she meet with Dr. Callan to discuss this as well.

Mr. Matranga said a report was being prepared for the Board on City/School District partnerships. He would be meeting with Ms. Harrison to explore this topic and to review current partnerships already in place.

Ms. Mossar said the Got Space group made their presentation after Ms. Codispoti's group left and that they were interested in working with her group, as they had worked with Palo Alto High School in the past. She believed this made more sense than involving the Parks and Recreation Commission at this time.

Ms. Codispoti said she would contact the Got Space group.

Ms. Kishimoto said at some point, someone from City staff should discuss what the City was looking for and give input on issues the Boosters needed to be aware of.

Ms. Codispoti said her group wanted to get all parties involved right at the beginning to determine parameters.

Ms. Mossar said Ms. Harrison needed to inform this Committee about what process it needed to go through to get to that point.

Ms. Codispoti said this would be very helpful and would speed the process up if everyone could get together to discuss what was possible right at the beginning.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if the Bol Park bike path next to Gunn was owned by Stanford.

Mr. Sarouhan said he believed the City owned it and that there was a variance.

Ms. Kishimoto said Bill Fellman said it would need to be renegotiated at some point.

Ms. Price suggested bringing this item back in May after the Board of Education item on School/City collaboration had been presented.

Ms. Mossar agreed, adding that Ms. Harrison could come back with a plan from the City at that time as well.

Ms. Price confirmed that this item would be brought back in May, after the School Board met on this to discuss other items as well in terms of partnership

Ms. Codispoti said her group, along with Mr. Matranga and Ms. Harrison would get more facts together.

Ms. Price thanked Ms. Codispoti for her thorough presentation.

4. Report on Shuttle Program

Ms. Likens, Ms. Durkin, and Lt. Venable introduced themselves and gave a presentation.

Ms. Likens said that the City and the District were working together on a number of transportation, bicycle/pedestrian safety, and trip reduction projects. This included school bus transportation and working cooperatively with the PTA and each individual school. There were currently 26 crossing guard locations and that there was a strong police presence. The focus of this presentation would be bus transportation. Benefits included reduction of congestion around school sites and along school commute corridors. The City Transportation Department was trying to promote less dependence on single occupant trips and healthier lifestyles for students. All of this encouraged more independence.

Ms. Durkin said there were currently 26 school buses running 23 routes daily in the morning and transporting 700 students daily. The service parameters included students in the Voluntary Transfer Program; Special Education; pay busing for students attending Nixon, Terman, and Gunn coming from Los Altos Hills and Stanford West area; and field trip transportation for education athletics. The Transportation Department had a \$1.9 million annual budget for the 2004-05 school year and the District fund contribution was \$812,000. Parent pay buses needed to be at full cost recovery, but at this point they were not.

Ms. Likens said the shuttle program began in 1999 as a pilot project. As of 2001 there were two shuttle routes: the Embarcadero shuttle (a CalTrain commuter shuttle) which ran every 15 minutes from the downtown CalTrain station along El Camino and out Embarcadero to the Baylands/East Bayshore Business Park area. In the reverse direction it also picked up Paly students. In the afternoon it took Paly students home. One of the morning shuttle trips also went crosstown to get kids from the Downtown North area to Jordan, as the City was trying to accommodate as many students as possible. The Crosstown Shuttle began as a mid-day shuttle operating between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. It expanded to all-day service in 2001 and now ran from Downtown Palo Alto in the morning and afternoon all the way out to the VA Hospital and serviced Gunn, Terman, and JLS. In the mid-day, it did not go out to the VA Hospital, but just out to Stevenson House. Jordan was also served in the afternoon by both the Embarcadero and Crosstown shuttles. Between 50% and 60% of the riders were PAUSD students. This percentage was a bit higher on the Embarcadero Shuttle because of the downturn in the economy, which made for fewer commuters. Between 700 and 800 riders were served per day during the school year. This number decreased considerably during the summer months, so in the summer (mid-June to August), routes were modified to meet summer school needs. The shuttle budget was \$486,000 this year. The City received \$120,000 in grant subsidy from CalTrain's shuttle program and contributed about \$328,000, while PAUSD contributed about \$38,000. This was because it had been determined in 2001 that in the afternoon, another vehicle was needed to serve Gunn and Terman.

The cost to transport PAUSD students was estimated to be about \$50,000, though in practice it had never gone above \$38,000, which was billed to the District. Without PAUSD's contribution, the City would have to reduce service, which would affect all schools currently being served. One issue regarding the shuttle was that a fare could not be charged because of the CalTrain grant requirements.

Ms. Mossar added that this was because the grant money was public money, so if a fare was charged for the shuttle, the public would in effect be double-charged.

Ms. Likens said that because the shuttle contract costs continued to increase each year, the Council had approved a fundraising campaign this year to maintain the current level of service. This campaign would focus on parents of students who regularly used the shuttle service and larger donors as well, and it could be an information item in the back to school packets. The target would be about \$25,000 a year. In terms of larger issues, there were problems in Palo Alto with the loss of VTA transit services such as bus routes, weekend service, and hours of transit.

Ms. Price added automobile ownership in this area was very high.

Ms. Likens said the shuttle program really needed greater capacity, especially in the morning with all the students riding the shuttle to school. The shuttle program was focusing on areas VTA did not serve, however VTA was reducing service areas even more. VTA, in partnership with the City and the District, could help in terms of improving service. VTA was going to look at shorter routes customized to meet the community's needs. A pilot program was being considered in Los Gatos, with the next area being South County. Ms. Likens was hoping the City and the District could work together to recommend that Palo Alto invite VTA to look at this area next instead. The benefit could be better overall VTA transit service, or possibly a subsidy of the shuttle program.

Ms. Price asked who the City was working with at VTA.

Ms. Likens said and Joe Kott had met with Matthew Tucker, but that a formal request had not yet been made. There were currently two programs: the Community Bus Program and the Rapid Bus Program which was now San Jose-based.

Ms. Price said the shuttle program appeared to be a victim of its own success. She saw many students waiting to get on the buses and she was delighted, however there were capacity issues.

Ms. Likens said the City had been using the VTA contractor, which operated a certain type of vehicle. The City had gotten one larger bus and was trying to get more. The difference in capacity was between 32 and 38 passengers.

Ms. Price asked if the vitality of the grant program was at risk and if there was any guarantee it would continue.

Ms. Likens said this was really at the discretion of CalTrain. The grant program was 25% funded by the Air Quality Management District, 50% funded by SamTrans/CalTrain, and 25% was covered by the City's local contribution for the Embarcadero shuttle. Over the past several years, funding had remained intact, but this was a year to year program. In May and June of each year, the City would find out what CalTrain's plans were for the next year.

Ms. Price asked if Joe Simitian knew how important this program was to the City and the District.

Ms. Mossar said he was not involved with CalTrain.

Ms. Price said that before funding was at tremendous risk, knowledge and support should be built for it.

Mr. Durham said that when fundraising was done, although the parents of kids using the shuttle would be a logical target, the program should target all families, especially at Paly, Gunn, and Terman. The rationale would be that more shuttle use would cut down on congestion in school neighborhoods.

Ms. Price added that the Partners in Education campaign and PTA efforts should be coordinated with this campaign so people were not having to give so much all at the same time.

Ms. Durham then asked if there was competition between this fundraising effort and the VTA. And if so, what the VTA would do?

Ms. Likens said the coordination with VTA would depend on the nature of the partnership.

Ms. Kishimoto said this had been a great presentation and that she had not realized that the District program was \$1.9 million and that there were 26 buses. This was much larger than she had thought.

Ms. Sundback, of the Gunn PTA, said that from the PTA perspective, they would like to see more parent pay programs. There was probably a lot more support, particularly to the "choice" schools, however this program was currently maxed out.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if that meant that the 26 PAUSD buses were fully utilized.

Ms. Durkin said that they were.

A woman from Gunn said she depended on the bus service very much. She asked if the community bus program would be coordinated so that the VTA buses could complement the shuttle.

Ms. Likens said she hoped the VTA would come in and re-evaluate the existing route structure in context with what the City was operating to see if they would recommend a better mix of resources.

The woman from Gunn said the shuttle and VTA came to Gunn at the same time. The PTA at Gunn would support a change, but funding would first need to be discussed with the District. She added that she was sure the Terman PTA would support this too.

Ms. Kishimoto said this was long overdue and should be continued right away.

Ms. Mossar said the most powerful thing the City could do was to develop a partnership with the District to get some extra power when approaching the VTA.

Ms. Price said this made a lot of sense and that she knew from experience that joint projects tended to be more successful, especially when competing for funding opportunities. If a case could be made to support VTA's efforts and help it better meet its own mission, this would be very compelling. She then asked what the next step was.

Ms. Likens said a communication needed to be provided at a higher level.

Ms. Mossar suggested developing a proposal that incorporated the Board of Education President, the Mayor of Palo Alto, District staff, City staff, and PTA.

Ms. Price said this made a lot of sense and was very impressive. She believed that it had been shown that focused community bus transportation was really what this community needed.

Ms. Kishimoto said the Community Bus Program cited the Palo Alto Shuttle program as an example.

Ms. Mossar said that Stanford University was quite aware of the fact that because its shuttle system had been very successful, VTA had made many cuts and left it on its own. Stanford might be an interesting partner in this effort. She suggested that this could be made a mini regional project, then VTA could be asked to add resources to it.

Ms. Price said VTA was required to provide services county-wide but it was up to it to determine how the services would be distributed. She believed the ideas presented today were very good. If there was a way VTA could come out as a partial winner, that would be very good.

Ms. Mossar asked Ms. Harrison what could be done to take this to the next level.

Ms. Harrison said she would like have a discussion with Mr. Matranga on this topic.

Ms. Mossar suggested Ms. Harrison and Mr. Matranga give an update at the April meeting on this topic.

Ms. Price agreed that this would be a good idea.

Ms. Sundback said her company had awarded the PTA a \$2,500 grant to improve the Safe Routes to School website. Several students would be working on this over the summer and bid specifications were being created for this site that would be linked to the PTA site. She was currently soliciting ideas, feedback, etc.

Ms. Harrison asked if Ms. Likens could post her presentation on the City's website.

Ms. Likens said she would do this.

Ms. Price said it was good to celebrate the successes in this town and educate people about them.

Adjournment at 9:30 a.m.