



# City/School Liaison Committee



## City/School Liaison Committee Meeting Wednesday, February 25, 2004

Civic Center  
Council Conference Room  
250 Hamilton Avenue  
Palo Alto

### Representing the City of Palo Alto:

Emily Harrison, Assistant City Manager  
Gayle Likens, Transportation Project Manager  
Lt. Mark Venable, Police Dept  
Sgt. Scott Wong, Police Dept  
Paul Dias, Director of Parks and Golf  
Amanda Jones, Coordinator of Transportation Systems Management  
Joe Kott, Chief Transportation Official  
Steve Emslie, Director of Planning  
Dena Mossar, City Council Member  
Jim Burch, City Council Member

### Representing Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD):

Camille Townsend, Board Member  
Mandy Lowell, Board Member  
Bob Golton, Deputy Superintendent

Chairperson Mossar called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m.

### **1. Approval of Minutes – December 18, 2003**

Mr. Burch moved to approve the minutes from December 18, 2003. Ms. Lowell seconded the motion.

The minutes were accepted as written.

### **2. Oral Communications**

There were no oral communications.

### **3. Georgia Avenue Traffic Calming**

Ms. Harrison introduced Lt. Mark Venable and Sgt. Scott Wong of the Palo Alto Police Department, and Gayle Likens from the Planning Department. Ms. Harrison gave some background as to how this agenda item had come to the committee. It came from the public when the new Terman school route came into conflict with traffic going to and from Gunn high school.

Sgt. Wong said the City had met with residents of the Terman neighborhood as well as with the School District to find solutions to the problem – to make it safer for students. The team discussed increasing parking at Gunn, a better drop-off area for students, and a better way to access the school. Part of the solution was to make the drop-off restriction at least 20 to 25 feet in front of the bike path. The School District also cut down some juniper trees to create better visibility.

Sgt. Wong said that so far, the solution has been a success. The team had to spend some time educating the public; some residents liked the solution and some did not. There was a period of warnings that came after the education component, which was followed later by the issuing of citations. Sgt. Wong said he thought the group might have to educate new parents each year with the new students entering Terman and Gunn. The parking signs were approved by Council and have been placed.

Ms. Lowell asked Sgt. Wong when the warnings started. Sgt. Wong said they began several weeks ago.

Ms. Townsend asked for an overview of Sgt. Wong's role.

Sgt. Wong said he is the supervisor of the Traffic Safety Team as well as a member of the School-City Traffic Safety Team. He has been doing traffic safety and enforcement for four years and believes that school safety is a very important issue in Palo Alto.

Lt. Venable said that the traffic team within the police department has the ability to be unencumbered by regular patrols, and therefore is able to hit the safety hot spots.

Sgt. Wong reiterated that the priority for the Traffic Team in general is the school safety zones.

Ms. Lowell said she did not see any Georgia Avenue residents present at the meeting; she asked if this meant they were ok with the changes.

Sgt. Wong said the changes are a work in progress.

Ms. Mossar said that things are working well from the perspective of Gunn staff.

Ms. Lowell said it would be good to start dispensing information in August or September for new parents.

Sgt. Wong said education does work.

Ms. Lowell said the back to school packets would be a good place for those materials.

Ms. Likens said she would work with the PTA and the schools to get the materials in the packets, and could work with Gunn to get a letter out to parents.

Ms. Mossar thanked the City staff.

#### 4. Status Report on Athletic Fields Renovations

Ms. Harrison introduced Paul Dias, Director of Parks and Golf for the City of Palo Alto and said he would give the committee a quick status report.

Mr. Golton introduced Augie Lauvagino, construction manager for the School District.

Mr. Dias reported that the cooperative field maintenance agreement between the City and the School District expires in June 2004. The current agreement is up for a five-year renewal, with the only change being the addition of the field at Terman.

The agreement began in 1993 when the City and the School District met to discuss how to maintain fields. Mr. Golton added that the agreement has been amended twice since its inception.

The agreement has worked well for the School District and has allowed them to combine efforts with the city. The fields are now as well-maintained as the city's parks. Mr. Golton said he was going to recommend to the School District property committee that they continue with the agreement.

Mr. Dias said that currently the City is doing renovations on its irrigations systems and that they are about halfway through all the school fields. The costs of fields maintenance will go down when the renovations are finished.

Ms. Lowell said she had been reading the history of the agreement and saw that one of the primary reasons the fields needed repair was because of the popularity of soccer; that cleats were destroying the fields. She asked if this has been taken care of.

Mr. Dias said the issue is still there.

Ms. Harrison commented that in addition to soccer becoming popular, there was a surge in the number of children using the fields, and they were being used year-round with no time to grow back in the summer before the school year started.

Mr. Dias said the teachers were complaining about the mud in the fields when they were watered, so the schools stopped watering the fields during the week, which consequently caused the grass to die.

Ms. Lowell wanted confirmation that half the school sites now have new irrigation systems.

Mr. Dias said yes.

Ms. Lowell asked what the schedule was for the next five years.

Mr. Dias said in 2004/05 Jordan would be completed; Duveneck and Juana Briones would be done in 2005/06; El Carmelo and Palo Verde would be done in 2006/07; Nixon would be done in 2007/08; and Oholone and Addison would be done in 2008/09.

Ms. Mossar asked if there had been any consideration of using artificial turf.

Ms. Harrison said there had, mostly at the high school sites. Artificial turf and lighting have both been discussed by the City/School Liaison Committee in the past.

Ms. Mossar said she would like to see artificial turf tried.

Ms. Lowell said that most high schools now use synthetic turf. She mentioned that Burlingame High School had just installed it as a joint city/school project.

Mr. Dias said it's good for all-weather play.

Ms. Mossar said that she knows the Palo Alto High School parent boosters are starting to raise the money to install lighting on the Palo Alto football field.

Mr. Dias said it would cost about \$1 million for each field, and the turf needs to be replaced every 10-12 years.

Ms. Lowell said that there is one site in Los Altos Hills – Pinewood – that is installing synthetic turf.

Mr. Dias said Palo Alto is working with other cities interested in artificial turf to try to lower the costs of purchase by buying in bulk.

Mr. Burch asked if the money was there.

Ms. Townsend asked about the cleanliness of the turf; what about dogs?

Ms. Harrison said the City is looking at artificial turf for its Mayfield site.

Ms. Townsend asked what ages the kids would be who will be using the Mayfield site. She had concerns about younger children and the roughness of the turf.

Ms. Harrison said the turf is very safe.

Ms. Lowell said the Pinewood elementary campus has it.

Mr. Dias said it does radiate heat, but it is safer than grass.

Ms. Townsend said that claim was also made about AstroTurf.

Ms. Lowell said this discussion was not part of what the committee was reviewing today.

Ms. Harrison said that when the School District wanted to work with the City and parent boosters, the City would be willing. There are too many people who want to use the fields, and lighting will be a key element to getting more usage out of them.

Mr. Burch said he believed that the Mayfield site was going to be open in the fall.

Mr. Dias said he thought the project was two months behind and would not open on schedule.

Mr. Burch said regardless, it would be the first example of synthetic turf in the City.

Mr. Golton wondered if the City would be interested in collaborating with Palo Alto High School financially on artificial turf and lights.

Ms. Harrison said no, because the City does not use that field. However, she suggested that the Utilities Department might be a resource to assist the group with economic use of lighting.

Ms. Townsend commented that the fields don't have to be lit during the summer.

Ms. Harrison said the School District has an advantage in the City's EIR process; there is a less vigorous review because the School District is reporting directly to the state.

Ms. Townsend said that the schools want to be good neighbors.

Ms. Harrison said that there was an experimental football game played at Paly with directed lighting which seemed to work very well.

Ms. Townsend asked if the City had experience with directed lighting.

Ms. Harrison said yes, and the City would be happy to work with the School District.

Mr. Dias said the City has a lot of information on both kinds of lighting systems, and would be happy to provide that information.

## **5. Proposal for citywide task force for school traffic safety**

Ms. Harrison introduced Steve Emslie, Director of Planning and Transportation for the City.

Ms. Mossar said that this item had been brought to the committee by residents and parents, and that they were going to make a presentation.

Kathy Durham began the presentation by talking about the tragedy of January 28, 2003, when a child was killed by a car on her way bicycling to school. A group of citizens and parents got together after that to ask the question what should the community be doing to ensure the safety of its children? They came out of the experience with the idea that there needed to be a safe routes to school program.

Rich Swint, the middle school representative on the City/School Traffic Safety Committee (CSTSC), continued with the presentation of the proposal. He began with some background information showing that the trend is not specific to Palo Alto. Mr. Swint talked about the benefits of walking and biking to school, why parents drive their children to school, and the 4 E's of traffic safety: engineering, enforcement, education and encouraging alternatives. He said that an example of bad traffic engineering is the two-way bike path at JLS.

Mr. Swint said since 1994 the CSTSC's focus has been reducing risk to students. They have been involved in PTA initiatives, partnering with the City and the School District, conducting safety evaluations of school sites and main school corridors, and education focused on reducing unsafe acts, such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade on-bike curriculum, Safe Moves (K-2 pedestrian safety), and Bike to Middle School.

Ann Crichton, a committee member, then showed some statistics on the neighborhood elementary school commute, and discussed the difference between 1994 and 2003 in Palo Alto. Partially in response to the efforts of the community and the CSTSC, more children and parents were walking and biking to school and fewer were driving in 2003 than in 1994, both in elementary and middle schools.

Mr. Burch said that Gunn High School had turned around the number of single drivers and those who carpool.

Ms. Townsend asked the group how it got the data it was using.

Mr. Swint said for middle school, they counted the numbers of bicycles in the cages.

Ms. Durham posed the question, "Why a community task force?"

Ms. Mossar said that she had attended a GoFast meeting the previous day. That group has been meeting for 23 years; last year they reported that they sold 85 carpool passes, while this year they sold 200.

Ms. Mossar also mentioned that GoFast had some issues related to directory assistance for finding carpool partners; there was some difficulty getting listings. The group is looking for some district-wide guidance on how to alleviate some of the hurdles.

Ms. Lowell said that there are new federal mandates with regard to listing directory information that make it difficult to print directories; this is true not just for carpooling but for all directory information related to schools.

Ms. Mossar said that she was using this as an example of potential collaboration. It would be good to have a forum for conversations like these and a group of people that can cut across all organizations, like a working group.

Ms. Townsend asked if this group was looking at big policy things, or more of the mechanics.

Mr. Swint said that the committee does well with the mechanics but would like to see the bigger policy issues addressed as well.

Ms. Mossar said the City has a bicycle advisory committee; they don't always get everything they need either, it's the nature of advisory groups. They are different from a body of policy makers.

Ms. Lowell said she had a process question: how to get the attention of policy bodies. She asked if the task force could help that process or make it more efficient? What are the issues? There is no mandate for such a group. One of Ms. Lowell's concerns is that the administration has been cut due to budget issues and there aren't any traffic people from the School District that can sit on this committee.

Mr. Golton said that Kathy Durkin would be the link between PAUSD staff and traffic committees.

Ms. Lowell said that too many groups want policy-making people involved in their issues and there just are not enough people to go around.

Mr. Golton said that Ms. Durkin could be the staff person they want.

Mr. Swint said that although he understood the budget constraints, the group needed a higher level task force for education and encouragement of alternatives. A grassroots education campaign is not that effective.

Ms. Crichton said that they need the group overall to look at the top issues impacting safe routes to school.

Amanda Jones, Coordinator of Transportation Management Systems for the City of Palo Alto, said that the group has had some real successes, but it takes a lot of work. The group will continue to have successes, even if at a grassroots level, but it would be more efficient and effective to have an overall ethos. Ms. Jones said that a great example would be Gunn's GoFast; she asked whether those resources could be shared with a community task force.

Ms. Townsend said maybe that could be a model for the task force.

Ms. Mossar said that she finds that people come to the City Council to express frustrations; GoFast has been a good model to use as an example. It would be nice to have a joint place to go talk about these things such as safe routes to school – how to decide what to do with the request.

Ms. Townsend said she does not foresee the committee taking over a grassroots effort. She suggested putting this topic on the City/School committee agenda four times a year as "transportation issues."

Ms. Lowell said that the school person who sits on this committee is given no authority to do anything – so whatever gets decided gets rehashed again later by the school board; if the School District has a person to dedicate, she's ok with it.

Ms. Townsend mentioned the Paly parking lot as an example of something that needed to be fixed.

Mr. Golton said that the site use plan was coming back to the board over the summer; the input of the Traffic Safety Committee is crucial.

Mr. Burch said that the most important thing to address was that it is critical for the committee to make a response; the group was asking for muscle and policy direction. He wondered if once a quarter the committee could expand its meeting to include this topic.

Ms. Mossar said they could start there, would like to possibly convene earlier.

Ms. Mossar asked staff to agendize this topic for the April meeting from 9-12. She asked those people who brought the item forward to work with Ms. Harrison to get the topics on the agenda, and the right people invited.

## **6. Future Meetings and Agenda Items**

Ms. Harrison suggested a topic for the next meeting would be sharing budget information.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, March 31 from 9-11 AM.

The April meeting will have the Traffic Safety committee on the agenda. It will be from 9 AM to 12 PM on Wednesday, April 28.

Meeting adjourned at 10:05 a.m.