Summary 9/24/12 School Needs Subcommittee Meeting
Present: Beecham, Golton, Kirner, Markevitch, Stevens, Tanaka
Staff: Dunkin, Lowell

The committee discussed the possible school development pattern for Cubberley, including time periods for making decisions about Cubberley and implications of use as a middle school rather than or in addition to a high school. The committee believes it is more likely, however, that Cubberley will be used as a high school in the long term than as a middle school in the short term.

The district does not appear to have needs for Cubberley for the next 5-7 years, nor plans for scraping the site nor a current need to redesign the site for use in 15 years, whereas for the City to build new construction with a bond, it appears the City needs to know in the next six months that it will have rights for 30 years use of land without recourse.

Due to needed flexibility to handle enrollment growth, the school district cannot give that assurance. Before meeting again, the School Needs subcommittee is awaiting information from the Community Needs subcommittee.

Notes
John Northway reported that problem definition is pretty well done, and groups will be looking at 5, 10, 15 year scenarios. The district has said that it is willing to renew the lease for at least the 5 year option provided in the lease. Because additional middle school space is needed, and an additional school middle school is proposed by 2020, the school configuration at Cubberley may be held in limbo for the next five years until/unless an alternative middle school site if found.

The district prioritizes use of Cubberley, which was previously the district’s 3rd high school and is its largest remaining site, as a high school over a middle school. The district prefers not to put the 4th middle school at Cubberley and has hired help to find another location, but it cannot exclude Cubberley at this time. Within 2 years, it is very likely that the district will know whether or not Cubberley is needed for the middle school.

For the City, however, it appears that the trigger point is to know within 6 months. To construct new buildings on its 8 acres with a bond, the City likely needs control of the 8 acre parcel for a 30 year or more period. It remains that the district is too likely to believe that it needs maximum flexibility for the entire site, which prevents being able to say that it can support an exclusive use of 8 acres without recourse for 30 years.

In terms of buildings, the articulated school need would be to reuse buildings to the extent possible to save costs. While school facility needs are certainly different now than they were in the 1950’s so that the existing buildings are not optimized for 21st century use, 15 years from now the school programs will also likely evolved in ways that can be conjectured but not accurately predicted now. The school district does not oppose two-story school construction, which is in fact currently underway at some sites.

Even if the district were to require new construction at Cubberley, it would be speculative and inefficient to attempt to design in the next 6 months, detailed school
facility and field configurations for a school in 2030 that would convince the district that 35 acres are not needed. While the school district is content with current buildings, to do what the City wants, the City needs new construction designed for its community use purposes. It is likely that new City facilities on the 8 acres could be compatible with future District needs but developing consensus on such facilities may be difficult in the current timeframe.

It had initially been assumed by some that the district would scrape existing buildings and erect new buildings that would use the site more efficiently, which might allow the district not to assert a need for the entire 35 acres and would enable new building configurations to be developed.

Cubberley is currently listed as a “community center”; can the community needs be addressed in current buildings? Northway pointed out that the entire existing site is configured very inefficiently regarding usable space versus circulation space, not in a way that anyone builds now in Palo Alto, and the buildings are old. The City’s 8 acres is not designed as a community center. He believes that the City would need to scrape the buildings and build new to do what it wants. It was discussed that, while the district has stated that it is willing to consider compatible uses, it is not clear what the City’s desired use for 8 acres is.

Community use is not necessarily a community center. It was then discussed what was required to have, for example, senior services by Avenidas, a place for the Red Cross and other non-profits. Community needs are being prioritized initially by the Community Needs sub-committee.

Accordingly, the School Needs Subcommittee has completed its discussions pending input from the Community Needs sub-committee. The School Needs meeting next meeting will be scheduled when further information is received.