

To: Palo Alto City Council
From: Palo Alto Parks and Recreation Commission
Date: April 23, 2013
Subject: PARC Response to Report of the Cubberley Community Advisory Committee

The Parks and Recreation Commission fully supports the recommendations of the Cubberley Community Advisory Committee (CCAC). We specifically want to emphasize the importance of the following recommendations from the CCAC Final Report (letter headings refer to the CCAC Report, Volume 1, starting on page 11):

A. “It is the strong recommendation of the CCAC that the entire Cubberley site become a joint/shared City/School District use facility.”

Community services make a vital contribution to the quality of life for all ages in Palo Alto. These services bring the community together and provide ways for our youth to build developmental assets, for families to have quality childcare and early education, and for all residents to pursue opportunities for life-long learning and recreation for health and well-being. The co-location of school and community services on Cubberley’s large and easily accessible site offers a unique opportunity to coordinate facility design and programming to accommodate a combination of joint and shared use of the site¹. Such an outcome promises not only to maximize use of this valued public resource, but also to realize an unprecedented integration of services for Palo Alto’s community. We urge you to pursue this strategy.

C. “The current Covenant Not To Develop should be removed from a Cubberley lease extension.”

We agree that the Covenant Not to Develop should be eliminated from the lease. The CCAC left it to lease negotiators to determine whether the funds associated with the existing Covenant Not to Develop would continue to flow to the School District in some way. While the School District relies on revenue from the Covenant in their annual budget, the City also faces substantial demands on those General Fund resources. Both agencies and the Palo Alto community also share a significant interest in a positive future for Cubberley. In light of the magnitude of the endeavor of comprehensive planning for shared use of Cubberley, we recommend that the City and the School District consider the option of using those "Covenant" dollars to support the steps

¹ Joint use is use of the same structure/facility by both sets of users (either time separated, i.e., classrooms used by school during the day, and by community after school, or concurrent, i.e. food service facilities available for both school and community use throughout the day). Shared use refers to use that may include joint use elements, but also simply co-location of separate facilities on the same site.

necessary to realize the vision of integrated school/community use of the site (including funding of such things as needs assessment, planning, design and development.)

I. “In the first five years of any lease extension, there should be a Community Needs Assessment developed with professional support.”

We strongly support investment in a comprehensive community needs assessment with specific direction to look at city-wide public resources, including school sites, recreation facilities (i.e., fields and gyms), and community centers, with an eye toward geographic distribution suited to needs, accessibility by walking, bicycling and transit and joint use opportunities. We know that community services are supported in both City and School facilities, but there is little, if any, coordination between the two and a dearth of usable data about what is provided where, to whom, and at what cost, and whether or how such programming serves the needs of the community.

We advocated for a Long-Range Master Plan for Parks and Recreation because we believe that parks and recreation improvements should not be considered in an ad hoc, reactive way. Instead, investments should be prioritized based on a more holistic view of community needs and resources. Using dog parks as an example, the community might be served better if we understood the type and size of facility and the geographic area(s) of greatest need and likely to get the most use, and then sought the best arrangement to accommodate it - instead of trying to squeeze any dog park into whatever space we can find.

Similarly, thoughtful programming for a large site like Cubberley should take into account an understanding of community needs and public resources throughout the city and how best to integrate that facility into the network of publicly supported services.

While the scope of the Long-Range Master Plan for Parks and Recreation is necessarily limited by the budget allotted, it will provide an important first step toward understanding our current park and recreation needs and resources. What it will not do is evaluate the supply and demand for the full range of publicly supported community services in Palo Alto or forecast the future needs of our growing and changing population. A city-wide, comprehensive needs assessment will fill in those gaps and help both the School District and the City to plan for appropriate programming and flexible new spaces and to make informed decisions about whether to make long term investments in the preservation of specific Cubberley facilities.

K. “The City and the School District shall explore the possibility of expanding City/School District joint-use agreement models including the expansion of joint-use at City and School District facilities.”

Given our growing population and shrinking opportunities to expand facility resources, the need to maximize use of our existing facilities will only increase. With the information to be gleaned from a comprehensive city-wide needs assessment, the City and School District will be in a good position to identify compatibilities in facility needs and to coordinate and prioritize facility use, both School- and City-owned. This course should be pursued not only at Cubberley, but at all publicly funded facilities.

Under the current model, both the City and individual school sites program their facilities with little consideration of the services provided by the other – and based on different guidelines and fee scales. Programming all public spaces in a more coordinated way would provide a greater

variety of services to more residents, bring rental fees into balance (based on size, type and quality of facility rather than who the landlord is), ensure that public spaces serve the local community, and exploit opportunities for cost efficiencies through cooperative maintenance and/or operations.

Expansion of existing joint-use agreements (e.g., the field use agreement) and development of new joint-use models will lay the critical groundwork to support the current and growing needs of our community.

Q. “The City should not relinquish ownership of its 8 acres.”

As noted above, meeting the needs of our growing and changing local population will require more community facilities, not less. As such, we strongly support retaining City ownership of 8 acres at Cubberley, as it ensures that both the City and the School District have a vested interest in cooperative development of the site while also safeguarding flexibility to address changing needs in the future.

Of Special Concern to the PARC:

Athletic Facilities – The CCAC report highlights the potential for a severe impact on availability of fields and gyms for community use if the School District plans a high school with a full athletic program. We are aware that many Council members hope to soften that impact through development of additional field and/or gym space at the Baylands Athletic Center (BAC) complex. However, we think it bears emphasis that the BAC is far from an ideal location, particularly for youth sports, due to its remote location, separated from the community by high traffic corridors and dangerous and limited bicycle and pedestrian connections. As a result, we would anticipate primary access by automobile, contributing to increased traffic congestion and parking demand. We encourage you to work closely with the School District to consider other options either in addition to, or instead of the BAC, to meet community needs for field/gym space, giving safe and easy access primary consideration.