

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing
La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District
Thursday, June 10, 2021

APPROVED MINUTES

Date: June 10, 2021

Place: Held Remotely via Zoom

County Committee on School District Organization Members Present:

Virginia Bamford, Lynne Esselstein, Maria Hilton, Bill Lock, Lillian Markind, Dennis McBride, Hilary Paulson, Rosie Tejada, Colleen You

County Committee on School District Organization Members Absent:

Greg Dannis, Melchoir Thompson

Staff Present:

Anne Campbell, Independent Consultant, County Committee on School District Organization
Niambi Clay, Secretary, County Committee on School District Organization
Timothy Fox, Deputy County Counsel

Chief Petitioners Present:

Hilary Gibson
Matthew Voss
Maressa Voss

Present from the District:

Amy Wooliever, Superintendent, La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Paulson called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and welcomed those present.

2. Description of Petition

Secretary Clay explained that the Superintendent's Office received a transfer of territory petition on April 14, 2021. The petition was then submitted to the Elections Office for verification of signatures as required and was forwarded to the California Board of Education and the Local Agency Formation Commission. The petition requests that a single parcel, in a territory considered uninhabited, located on the westside of Skyline Boulevard north of Old La Honda Road be transferred from the La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District (LHPUSD) to the Portola Valley School District (PVSD) and the Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD). The primary reason for the request is the property's location, as the petitioners contend that the property shares a substantial community identity with the PVSD and the SUHSD, rather than the LHPUSD. The transfer of territory process requires that the CCSDO hold two public hearings,

one in each of the affected school districts. There will be two distinct public hearings, the first for the LHPUSD and the second for both the PVSD and the SUHSD. At the conclusion of the public hearings, the CCSDO will access what further information is needed to assist in decision making. Staff will prepare the requested information and bring it forward to the CCSDO at the next regular meeting. The CCSDO is well within its timeline if they take final action on the petition at a subsequent meeting in July or August. Final determination to approve or disapprove the petition on merits based on Education Code is 120 days from June 10, 2021, which is October 8, 2021.

3. Overview of Petition Process and Public Hearing

Chairperson Paulson explained the process for the evening is for the petitioners and their representatives, as well as individuals from each school district, to have the opportunity to present information to the CCSDO. CCSDO members can ask questions to the presenters and to staff members from SMCOE. If questions cannot be answered, research will be conducted and brought back at the next meeting on July 12. Comments from members of the public are allowed later in the meeting. Deputy County Counsel Fox confirmed that discussion was allowed between CCSDO members but there should not be deliberation on any action.

4. Presentation by Petitioners

Petitioners Matthew and Maressa Voss shared that they have two children, Makenna, age 4, and Addy, age 2, and thanked and expressed appreciation to the CCSDO for the opportunity to make their case. Mr. Voss emphasized that they do not want to change school districts but they have to. They had nothing but positive experiences with the LHPUSD community and schools but do not live in the LHPUSD community. He discussed his daughters' access to the school system and how no families who attend the LHPUSD are within walking and biking distance. However, there are families within walking and biking distance of many PVSD schools, many of whom are friends with the Voss family. When his eldest daughter enrolls in kindergarten in the fall, they will miss out on the shared community which comes with attending the same schools as neighbors. It also means that families would not be available to share carpool duties and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to schedule afterschool play dates and school activities. In an emergency, help would have to commute long distances far from where they live. The family also believes parent access would be heavily restricted, as well. They are very familiar with the logistical challenges which come from living in an area which is not densely populated and have been more than willing to make that sacrifice. However, while all families have logistical challenges, they feel their family situation is unique because Mrs. Voss' job provides little flexibility. She is contractually obligated to stay within 40 minutes of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospital in Palo Alto when on call. The family hopes to be active parents, like their own parents, and participate in before and after school programs, which can be difficult with long, round trip 80 minute to two hour journeys to Pescadero, especially in emergencies.

Mr. Voss emphasized this is not just a matter of inconvenience because they are resilient, flexible, and willing to make sacrifices. They also feel there are many issues stacked together which make their case. He explained they have a child who may commute for 1.5 hours each day for school to the middle and high school, while having both middle and high schools only 17-19 minutes away and easily accessible for both parents nearly 100% of the time, due to proximity to home and work. Right now, the family is cut off and isolated from the LHPUSD community, which would be fine if they were completely cut off and isolated from the PVSD,

but they have a robust and heavily populated local community steps away in all directions from the house. Every side of their house is surrounded by PVSD-assigned parcels. They also have unusual jobs which requires frequent life-saving emergency phone calls and schedule changes. Mr. Voss referred to a map displaying a few nearby parcels assigned to the PVSD schools which makes it obvious that the family's community is the PVSD and the SUHSD. He described how neighbors to the east, west, north, northeast, northwest, and southeast attend, have attended, or will attend the PVSD and the SUHSD. There are quite a few neighbors significantly further away from the PVSD who attend the PVSD, and neighbors significantly closer to the LHPUSD who attend the PVSD, which is a strange situation. The family expected that they would be surrounded by other families with whom to attend LHPUSD schools.

Mr. Voss referred to a website which maps out individual parcels and assigns them to residential, open space, or commercial use. He discussed how the yellow parcels over the seven-mile stretch north and south of Sky Londa are assigned to PVSD and SUHSD, but that doesn't necessarily mean they all attend those schools. There are more than the 70 parcels listed but he purposely cut it off to not exaggerate the PVSD presence on the street. Despite cutting it off, there are still 70 parcels assigned to PVSD and four assigned to LHPUSD. He has reached out to his neighbors who have never attended and have no plans to attend LHPUSD. Mr. Voss included a before-and-after diagram with LHPUSD parcels color-coded blue and turning to yellow if the territory transfer is granted. He summarized that among all parcels along the stretch zoned for residential use, only four are assigned to LHPUSD and none have children attending or planning to attend LHPUSD. There was one individual who attended PVSD schools because prior to 1968 they were part of the PVSD.

Mrs. Voss explained they are only 10 feet from the town of Portola Valley, and their property line is only 10 feet from the town of Woodside but 6.6 miles from the closest part of La Honda and 23 miles from the Pescadero schools. Their territory transfer request is unique and required because they have neighbors in all directions within the PVSD and the SUHSD. They believe these territory transfers were put in place for circumstances like theirs to ensure families are able to attend school with members of their community.

Mrs. Voss described in detail her job as a perfusionist at the Palo Alto VA Hospital and how heart and lung procedures cannot wait the 40 minutes it takes to get to Pescadero. She is obligated under contract to be within 40 minutes at all times and half the year she is on call. Her day is never truly done and she can always be called back, which is common with difficult procedures. Mrs. Voss stated if the territory transfer is not approved, it will make her difficult job impossible. There is currently a shortage of perfusionists in the field due to the high demands of COVID and the aging population. She has been on call every holiday, has sacrificed time with loved ones, and has worked throughout the entire COVID pandemic. Mrs. Voss emphasized how she wants to participate in her children's education and how because her mother was a public school teacher for 30 years, she never considered anything but public school for her own children. If her children have an emergency at school, she would be able to step away for the 15 minutes it takes to get to PVSD schools and would still be able to return to work. She stated they want public school access and are out of options.

Mr. Voss agreed his family is genuinely interested in the public school system based on their own experiences and those of their relatives. They want to be active participants in the public school system and plan on staying in their community through retirement. The family hopes to find a long term solution ensuring they have the opportunity to build community and have continuity

throughout the course of their childrens' public school career. They believe this is the perfect time to transition in order to provide an excellent public school experience versus a mismatch of different schools at different times. Mrs. Voss explained they have also attempted to address this issue through an interdistrict transfer, which was rejected. They are ultimately asking for the PVSD and the SUHSD to add one more parcel, accounting for less than a 0.2% expansion, and for the LHPUSD to subtract one parcel, accounting for less than 0.2% contraction. The family is open to creative and cooperative solutions that seek to mitigate any concerns the districts may have and they have tried to research and exhaust all options. He reiterated the family's hope that their children attend public schools and they have zero plans otherwise.

In summary, Mr. Voss asked that the family be able to join their neighbors, none of whom attend the LHPUSD. They live in a bountiful community with generous and impressive neighbors attending the PVSD and the SUHSD. He feels the family has unusual criteria with medical employment distance requirements and described how they are surrounded by clusters of PVSD families in all directions. Mr. Voss thanked the CCSDO for their time and stated they hope to have a dialogue and are happy to listen to concerns and find a long term solution.

Chairperson Paulson asked if any CCSDO members had questions for the petitioners. Committee Member Markind asked when the petitioners purchased their house. Mr. Voss replied it was July 2020. Committee Member Markind asked if the petitioners knew to which district they were assigned. Mr. Voss replied they believed, after speaking with their realtor and neighbors, they were able to attend the PVSD. He stated they have a next door neighbor assigned to the LHPUSD who attended the PVSD. Therefore, the situation was confusing and surprising and this was their first foray into the school system so they were inexperienced. They had not anticipated the process would be so tricky. Committee Member Markind asked again if the parcel's assignment was clearly noted in the real estate transaction process. Mr. Voss stated the real estate agent gave the impression that the Woodside School District and the PVSD were definitive possibilities, but once they looked back at the paperwork, they realized it should have been obvious that the LHPUSD was the assignment.

Committee Member Markind referred to Mrs. Voss' position as a perfusionist and asked if Mr. Voss wanted to provide information on his occupation. Mr. Voss described how he serves a compliance function and similar to Mrs. Voss, doesn't work for a big company, works for a two-person company, is on call 50% of the time and 24 by 7, can't take vacation at the same time as colleagues, and can't take the same plane ride with colleagues. As a regulatory function, he cannot step away from the desk during stock market hours. Between he and his colleague, one must always be watching the desk and preferably both most of the time. He and Mrs. Voss both must schedule vacations eight to nine months in advance. If his daughter has an emergency, unless he has proper coverage, which is unlikely in a lot of situations, he would not be able to leave his desk because he is responsible for making sure the markets don't collapse.

Committee Member Markind referred to the family's rejected interdistrict transfer to the PVSD and asked if that had been appealed to the County Board of Education. Mrs. Voss replied that the rejection happened recently and they will be appealing within the next week.

Committee Member Markind referred to the calculations of each district gaining or losing 0.2% and asked if those figures were calculated by parcel numbers or financially. Mr. Voss stated the figures was based on parcels combined with their financial contribution, estimating roughly 40% of the property tax due per parcel goes to education. He apologized if his figures were off a bit

but they were based on his best efforts to study previous petitions and public records, and he asked that any errors be pointed out.

Committee Member Tejada asked about the interdistrict transfer and whether the family was rejected by the LHPUSD. Mr. Voss clarified that the LHPUSD released the family but they were rejected by the PVSD. Committee Member Tejada asked if the family had reached out to the LHPUSD. Mr. Voss stated his understanding of the territory transfer process was that it could be helpful to reach out to the school district to hear their concerns and see if they would be willing to work on mitigation. Being cognizant of the pressures of COVID on educators, over a six-month period they emailed every few weeks and had their legal counsel reach out. They began one small conversation but the LHPUSD did not verbalize their thoughts and the family gave up. Committee Member Tejada asked if there was only one response in the months they reached out to the LHPUSD. Mr. Voss confirmed there was one response and one meeting, but nothing ever came of it.

Committee Member McBride asked for clarification on whether the family received permission to leave Pescadero. Mr. Voss explained that there are two components, the interdistrict transfer and the territory transfer. They received permission from the PVSD to pursue the interdistrict transfer.

Board Member Esselstein asked if the family was given a reason from the PVSD for not granting the transfer. Mr. Voss stated they had a public hearing, and like any district, they are trying to protect class sizes and students. He feels they are worried about granting too many interdistrict transfers and want to avoid class size problems, so they might be denying transfers to everyone and leaving a few spots for flexibility in the more serious cases. Board Member Esselstein asked if the reason given was class size. Mr. and Mrs. Voss confirmed that was accurate. Board Member Esselstein asked if a class size number was specified. Mr. and Mrs. Voss responded they prefer 18 or 19 students and not more than 20.

Committee Member McBride shared that the PVSD is community-funded, which is the old term for basic aid, so from their perspective, they are not getting any additional funding for extra students.

Mr. Voss asked his counsel Ms. Gibson to clarify if even being basic-aid, the PVSD would still get the additional property tax revenues. Ms. Gibson confirmed with an interdistrict transfer, there would be no transfer of revenue. Committee Member McBride stated that the parcel money follows the parcel.

Committee Member Markind referred to the PVSD being basic-aid district and asked about the status of the LHPUSD. Mr. Voss confirmed they are also basic-aid.

Chairperson Paulson referred to the slide showing the blue parcels next to the family's home, and asked if the three parcels north of their home are occupied or if that is open space. Mr. Voss indicated he tried to highlight parcels in yellow and not reference open space or abandoned/unoccupied parcels. He confirmed all four parcels are residentially zoned and at least one has been marketed to sell for roughly 15 years. Ms. Voss added one parcel is a retired couple and there is a family on the other parcel with no children.

5. Presentation by School Districts

Superintendent Wooliever expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak to the CCSDO. She stated in her role as superintendent, she is speaking on behalf of staff and families. Due to the end of the year, this year in particular, and the timing of this petition, the Board has not had time to hold formal discussions and declare a position. She assured they would prepare a formal position prior to the July meeting.

Superintendent Wooliever confirmed that the LHPUSD approved the interdistrict transfer request. She explained that the LHPUSD is the smallest district in San Mateo County with the largest geographical area, covering roughly 175 square miles. They are unusual, ranging from the redwoods to the coastal regions, and are entirely unincorporated with no municipal government or advocacy. The district is socioeconomically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, with residents not connected by playgrounds, libraries, grocery stores, or movie theaters, but by their schools. The schools serve as the glue where they play, exercise, learn, and gather. Superintendent Wooliever spoke of the continued impact of moving district boundaries and shared her respect for Mr. Voss' family's position. She explained this is the third petition to transfer property from the LHPUSD to the PVSD in the last eight or nine years. The previous two petitions were approved, LHPUSD's appeals were denied, and the properties were successfully transferred.

Superintendent Wooliever shared that some of the dots on Mr. Voss' map are properties formerly in the LHPUSD transferred through the petition process. Each petitioner cited long distances from the school community among the rationale in the petitions to transfer property and each boundary change leaves new neighbors as the farthest house out. The last petition approved by the CCSDO transferred 10 homes and 23 parcels which were seven minutes from La Honda Elementary School. Superintendent Wooliever stated that the CCSDO makes important decisions which profoundly impact families as well as institutions, and their role is large. She recognized and expressed appreciation for the fact that CCSDO members are volunteers. She stated she hopes to help them understand what it is like to be a rural district in a wealthy, suburban county, so when they make their decision and consider the LHPUSD's position, they have that context.

Superintendent Wooliever explained that being rural brings both joys and sorrows. Silicon Valley neighbors flock to small towns on the weekends for ecotourism, surfing, ad tourism, berry picking, and goat farms. At the same time, deep infrastructure issues are completely out of context with the rest of the Bay Area. Residents struggle for clean water, warm housing, and affordable food and services. They travel long distances to attend non-district events, through roads which must withstand the fury of nature. Students bus many miles back and forth to school, trips must be planned over the hill for doctors, dentists, and groceries, and there is one 7 a.m. Samtrans route out of Pescadero each morning, returning at 7 p.m. that same night. There are no taxis, no Ubers, and no rideshares. They are a rural district made up of rural residents and rural life is not convenient.

Superintendent Wooliever explained as she works with her Board to carefully consider this petition, they will fairly weigh the needs of the petitioner and the needs of the school district. Often in society, the needs of the small and underresourced are overlooked and ignored. She thanked the CCSDO for listening and said she needs the local agencies to know who they are.

She reiterated she would send the CCSDO the formal position of the LHPUSD by the end of the month.

Committee Member Markind asked if Superintendent Wooliever was aware of the loss in dollars the district would suffer if this territory was transferred. Superintendent Wooliever replied that the district receives roughly 46.8% of all property taxes, which is higher than elementary or high school districts because they are unified. They also do not have a lot of municipal agencies in the community. She didn't have the exact amount, but indicated this is about the continued movement of the property line, because this would be the third movement of the property line. The district borders four different school districts and similar cases can be made about distance, even with the Cuesta population. The community is a big rural area and there are long distances. Her concern, not speaking for the Board, is the chipping away of the boundary line.

Committee Member Lock referred to the two previous properties moved from the LHPUSD and asked relative to geography, if they are close to this particular parcel. Superintendent Wooliever replied that the first petition was on Skyline Boulevard and was unique, so the district did not oppose. It was a two parcel piece of property, with one parcel in the PVSD and one in the LHPUSD. The second petition was lower and closer to the LHPUSD, off of Highway 35, and was a subdivision. It was called the La Honda Petition but was in the Sequoia subdivision. That was 23 parcels and 10 homes, and was a lengthy process. It started in 2013 and didn't wrap up until 2018. The district went to the State Board of Education on a double appeal, and lost.

Committee Member Lock referred to the lines being redrawn due to the Census every 10 years and asked if this impacted the LHPUSD boundaries. Superintendent Wooliever responded that she did not believe that the Census redrawing has any impact on school district boundaries.

Committee Member McBride referred to the map showing the light blue dots closer to the LHPUSD and the petitioner's house outside that boundary and asked how that is encroaching on the district. If that was flipped and their house was on the west side of Skyline Boulevard, it would seem to be encroaching, but it isn't so obvious. Superintendent Wooliever indicated it was the first time she had seen that map so she would have to take a closer look to understand the details. She discussed how school district boundaries are very complicated, citing the example of Gregorio Road. Anything south of that road is in the LHPUSD and anything north of that road is in the Cabrillo Unified School District (CUSD), but there are areas where the boundary snakes around. They manage the situation by allowing interdistrict transfers depending on which district is closer and easier. She isn't as familiar with the Skyline border, although she knows the last petition approved to move boundaries was an area way off of that corridor, which created a pocket of Portola Valley which is seven minutes away from the elementary school. They argued at the time that this would just keep pushing the boundary and that decision left the Voss family in a more isolated position in terms of school choice.

6. Public Comment

There were no persons wishing to address the CCSDO.

Mr. Voss pointed out with this particular territory transfer, his family was not dependent on either of the previous territory transfers and they did not access this possibility because of previous territory transfers. He indicated that previously approved territory transfers had weaker arguments because his family is geographically farther away from the LHPUSD and closer to the

PVSD, and there are additional factors. Mr. Voss agreed that not every territory should be transferred but they are on a ring even further away from previous approvals. He emphasized that they are not a continuation of the line moving and moving.

7. Next Steps

Chairperson Paulson asked if any CCSDO members required additional information from staff to assist in the discussion at the next meeting. Committee Member McBride asked if staff could look at the map and validate that it is correct. Chairperson Paulson stated she needed more clarification if the blue dots were people who had territory transfers, were on interdistrict transfers, or if their properties were previously part of the PVSD.

Committee Member Esselstein asked for a highlight of the stages Superintendent Wolliever mentioned to see what territories were affected, where they were relative to the elementary schools, and where they ended up. She asked if they all went to the PVSD or if they went to other districts.

Committee Member Markind asked how much money has left the LHPUSD in the past five to ten years to see any trends. She also hopes to understand what legal policies the CCSDO abides by. Chairperson Paulson clarified at the next meeting Deputy County Counsel Fox would provide instructions on whether the CCSDO may look at previous decisions or must take each petition in isolation and base it on the standards presented. Deputy County Counsel Fox assured the CCSDO that staff would prepare a presentation outlining the factors the CCSDO considers, and it would be wise to provide that to members in writing in advance of the meeting to allow time for review.

Board Member Hilton stated she was pleased to have Deputy County Counsel Fox present and also hopes to have those questions answered, in particular following up on the process the previous transfers went through, which body granted the final decision, and what factors the CCSDO may and may not consider.

Chairperson Paulson informed the Voss family that many CCSDO members are new, and this is the first petition done online and the first one done in quite a while. She assured them that the CCSDO wants to do everything correctly.

Chairperson Paulson asked that in terms of maps, staff address the issue of creating islands, which means leaving houses behind which would need to be transferred or should have been part of this petition.

Secretary Clay requested that the Voss family send their presentation to her. Mr. Voss assured it would be sent, along with written statements and any additional questions.

Chairperson Paulson informed that there would be a second public hearing for the PVSD at 7:30 p.m. with a separate Zoom link.

8. Adjournment of Public Hearing

Chairperson Paulson adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.