

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing
Portola Valley School District and Sequoia Union High 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:

Anne Fazioli, Trustee, Portola Valley School District
Roberta Zarea, Superintendent, Portola Valley School District

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Paulson called the meeting to order at 7:35 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 distinct public hearings, one in each of the affected school districts. The first for the LHPUSD was just held and this one is for both the PVSD and the SUHSD. At the conclusion of the public hearings, the CCSDO will assess 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, as well as individuals from each school district, to have the opportunity to present information to the CCSDO and members can then ask questions. Comments from members of the public are allowed later in the meeting. If need be, CCSDO members will provide direction to staff for requested information prior to proceeding with the decision making, likely to occur at the next meeting scheduled for July 12, 2021.

4. Presentation by Petitioners

Petitioners Matthew and Maressa Voss introduced themselves and shared that they have two children, Makenna, age 4, and Addy, age 2. Mr. Voss explained they purposely prepared the same presentation for both school districts because they felt both would benefit from all they had to share, they really want to work with both school districts, and they hope to reinforce their points.

Mr. Voss emphasized that the family does not want to change school districts but they have to. They were very excited when they spoke to the principal at the LHPUSD because the district had interesting anecdotes which recalled positive memories of what their daughter liked in preschool, such as mixed class sizes. They met several outstanding members of the LHPUSD and have nothing negative to say about the district or the community, however they are not part of that community and the boundaries are between 15 minutes to an hour away. As much as they enjoy their interactions with the LHPUSD, they do not live in that community.

Mr. Voss explained that currently 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. The family hoped to meet some families from the LHPUSD but unfortunately, they could not find one family. This means they would miss out on the shared community which comes with attending the same schools as your neighbors and makes it difficult to share carpool duties, which is particularly useful in their situation. It would be difficult to find families available to help with play dates and school activities or in an emergency if their child was sick. Mr. Voss explained how he and his wife have unusual logistical challenges, which is not uncommon, and they are not complaining, however their family situation is unique. Mrs. Voss' job provides very little flexibility and 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 participate in before and after school programs, which

can be challenging with long, round trip 80 minute to two hour journeys to Pescadero. They believe their territory transfer is not merely inconvenient and they pride themselves on inconvenience. They try to make things work but they don't have just one issue with which to contend. Mr. Voss 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. He stated the territory transfer is not just about geography and they are not isolated from all communities. They have a robust and heavily populated local community steps away in all directions attending the PVSD and the SUHSD but are completely cut off from the LHPUSD community.

Mr. Voss discussed his wife's unusual job which requires frequent life-saving emergency phone calls and schedule changes. He referred to a map displaying his house and shared that their community is the PVSD and the SUHSD. There are neighbors to the east, west, north, northeast, northwest, and southeast who attend, have attended, or will attend the PVSD and the SUHSD. He explained how there is one blue dot on his map in the far southwest who has not been in the PVSD. The blue dots are indicative of families they have met and there are actually hundreds of parcels in the area assigned to the PVSD. He pointed out how there are neighbors significantly further away from the PVSD who attend the PVSD, and neighbors significantly closer to the LHPUSD who attend the PVSD, which has always been the case regardless of historical territory transfers.

Mr. Voss referred to a map showing a seven-mile stretch of Skyline Blvd a mile north of Sky Londa and several miles south of Sky Londa. He explained his family signed up for a subscription online which draws these maps and marks the residential parcels in yellow. The map shows there are at least 70 parcels very close and 100-200 parcels beyond that which are residentially zoned and assigned to the PVSD. There are only four parcels assigned to the LHPUSD, and the maps shows the before and potential after of the territory transfer. Instead of four parcels assigned to the LHPUSD, there will be three, with the Voss parcel potentially assigned to the PVSD. Mr. Voss explained that none of the neighbors attend LHPUSD schools and historically there is a community of families residing in the area for over 150 years and these legacy families attended PVSD Schools because the map was different in the past.

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. Mrs. Voss highlighted that her husband also works in a two-person company and needs to be at his desk most of the time, so they are in a unique situation.

Mr. Voss expressed that his family is looking for public school access and are out of options. They want to be active participants in the public school system for a long period of time and plan on staying in their community through retirement. They have become partial to the community in a very short period of time. The territory transfer is a long term solution ensuring they have the opportunity to build community and have continuity throughout the course of their children's public school career. Mr. Voss shared he believes they have attempted everything required before engaging in a territory transfer, one being an interdistrict transfer, which was approved by the LHPUSD and rejected by the PVSD due to class size. They have also proactively reached out to the LHPUSD to attempt to address concerns and emphasized that they are not underestimating the concerns of the PVSD. Ultimately, they are 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.

Mr. Voss summarized that the territory is not about jobs, geography, or community, but they want to join their neighbors. They have many clusters of neighbors and families and they want to join in their entire community, which includes the PVSD. There have zero neighbors who attend the LHPUSD but an impressive number of neighbors who attend the PVSD. The family also has unusual critical medical employment distance requirements which are incompatible with PVSD attendance. He doesn't feel the family would be requesting a territory transfer if the LHPUSD schools were merely inconvenient. They have reached the point where it is impossible to navigate these waters. Mr. Voss thanked the CCSDO for listening to his presentation for the second time.

Chairperson Paulson emphasized that the family not tailoring the presentation for one school district versus another is not an issue. She asked if any CCSDO members had questions for the petitioners and there were no questions.

5. Presentation by School Districts

Superintendent Zarea commented that the PVSD does not have a presentation and is maintaining a neutral stance on the petition.

Trustee Fazioli stated she was just listening to the presentation.

Committee Member Markind asked how many schools are in the PVSD. Superintendent Zarea answered there is one TK-3rd grade called Ormondale and one 4th – 8th grade school called Corte Madera. Committee Member Markind asked if everyone in Portola Valley in TK-3rd grade goes to one school and everyone in 4th - 8th grade goes to a second school and there are no choices for parcels to make. Superintendent Zarea confirmed that was accurate.

Committee Member Lock asked the approximate distance from the petitioner's home to the TK-3rd grade school. Superintendent Zarea clarified the question and apologized that she did not have that information. Chairperson Paulson indicated that would be a question for staff.

6. Public Comment

There were no persons wishing to address the CCSDO.

7. Next Steps

Chairperson Paulson confirmed the next CCSDO regular meeting was July 12, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. At that point, they will receive staff responses to questions. She asked if CCSDO members had any additional questions for staff. Committee Member You referred to the requested detailed map and added it would be helpful to have the geographic areas of the districts as they are now shaded to differentiate between the LHPUSD, the PVSD, and the SUHSD. Chairperson Paulson added that the Woodside School District (WSD) is in the same area. Committee Member You asked if the WSD could be included, too. Deputy County Counsel Fox explained that occasionally the petitioners prepare a map with that level of detail, but when they don't, staff can also prepare that information. Committee Member You indicated that would be helpful in terms of perspective and understanding the geographics. Deputy County Counsel Fox stated he also heard the request at the conclusion of the prior public hearing that staff prepare materials describing the historical boundary and the last two territory petitions referenced by LHPUSD which Superintendent Wooliever referenced. He indicated a flip book would be provided to show the boundary as of the beginning of the year 2000 and illustrating the current state and how they got there.

Chairperson Paulson informed that there has not been a territory transfer done for quite a while and many CCSDO members are new, so there will be a lot of questions and references to procedural and legal issues.

Committee Member McBride asked if a decision to allow the transfer allows for a "creep" and 10 or 15 more houses requesting transfers. Deputy County Counsel Fox answered that historically, staff has been strong at presenting information on the territory. Staff can provide information in great detail about where the territory resides in terms of school district boundaries. They historically have not investigated where nearby families are attending school and they do not have a great toolkit for finding answers to those questions. This is typically presented by the petitioners based on anecdotal evidence, but that is not something that staff verifies or has tried to confirm. If the CCSDO members are interested in where neighbors are sending their children to school, staff can better answer the question of where they are voting, where they are paying their property taxes, and where their parcel resides in terms of boundaries. But they have not asked for names of students attending schools on the basis of interdistrict transfers or whether they attend public or private schools. They generally have relied upon the petitioners to provide any information they have and treated this as anecdotal evidence without undertaking independent analysis. Committee Member McBride clarified he was referring to the territory, not where the students attend school. Deputy County Counsel Fox replied that was understood and appreciated.

Committee Member Bamford asked if the July 12, 2021, meeting was a Zoom meeting. Chairperson Paulson responded she was unsure. Deputy County Counsel Fox explained the Governor's Executive Order that established suspension of certain rules which made teleconference attendance difficult will continue indefinitely because the Governor expects to provide future Executive Orders allowing a transition back to a permanent, settled status in regards to public meetings. There are bodies in San Mateo County planning to resume in-person meetings and some are undertaking in-person meetings already. They allow attendance by members and public participation through teleconference, usually without requiring the provisions of the Brown Act subject to the Governor's suspension of the order. He emphasized that this is complicated, but if it were in the interest of the CCSDO to have a hybrid meeting with some people in the room, his advice would be to continue to allow members of CCSDO and the public to participate through teleconference, because the Governor's order will continue to be in effect until it is replaced. The Governor intends to issue further orders which will change the rules, but we cannot know for sure what this will look like until it happens. Chairperson Paulson summarized that they will keep everyone updated and a hybrid meeting is possible.

Chairperson Paulson reminded the next meeting was on July 12, 2021, which Deputy County Counsel Fox confirmed did not need to be convened as a public hearing. However, he advised whenever there is a Brown Act meeting, public comment should be accepted on each item. So, there will still be the opportunity to accept public comment at that meeting on agenda items. While the CCSDO wants additional information, they want at least to have the option to have both consideration of the merits of the petition and potential action on the agenda, and he recommended there should also be the allowance of public comment, but not necessarily convening a new public hearing.

Chairperson Paulson asked the petitioners to feel free to send additional information to Secretary Clay to forward to members as necessary, and reminded they would have the opportunity to comment at the July 12, 2021, meeting. She indicated the petitioner's power point would be included as part of the minutes of both public hearings.

Committee Member Tejada noted that the meeting was being recorded and asked where that recording would be used. Chairperson Paulson stated she assumed the recording would be used for the creation of the minutes. Secretary Clay confirmed the meeting was being recorded over Zoom and also with an audio recorder for Superintendent's Office staff to utilize in the typing up of detailed minutes. Committee Member Tejada asked if the meeting was going to be posted anywhere. Secretary Clay confirmed the minutes would be posted but not the recording. Consultant Campbell added that the Zoom recording is kept until the CCSDO approves the meeting minutes and then the Zoom recording is destroyed.

8. Adjournment of Public Hearing

Chairperson Paulson adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.