

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing Minutes
May 6, 2013
Approved Minutes

Date: May 6, 2013

Place: Redwood City Elementary School District Board Room
750 Bradford Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

Committee Members Present:

Virginia Bamford; Greg Dannis; Hilary Paulson; Laura Rich; George Robinson; Robert Stelzer

Committee Members Absent:

Mel Thompson

Committee Staff Present:

Tim Fox, Deputy County Counsel; Nancy Magee, Secretary to County Committee

Chief Petitioners Present:

Mr. Robert Meyer

Present from the District:

Superintendent Jan Christensen, Redwood City Elementary School District
Dennis McBride, Trustee, Redwood City Elementary School District
Clair Cunningham, Deputy County Counsel, Redwood City Elementary School District

Call to Order:

Chairperson Robert Stelzer called the public hearing to order at 7:15 p.m. He asked Committee Secretary, Nancy Magee, to provide an overview of the petition.

Overview of the Petition:

Secretary Magee explained that a transfer of territory petition was submitted to the Office of the Superintendent in late February. The petition was then submitted to the Election's Office for verification of signatures as required. Ms. Magee explained that in addition, the petition was also forwarded to the Assessor's Office for verification of parcels and to determine the accuracy of the current school district assignments.

Ms. Magee said the petition requests that seven houses between 60 and 90 Loma Road be transferred from the Redwood City Elementary School District into the San Carlos School District. A primary factor in this petition is a landslide that occurred in the early 1970's that has essentially cut off the thoroughfare of the street and turned the street into a dead end. As a result, the petitioners are questioning the existing school district boundary line.

Overview of Petition Process and Public Hearing:

Ms. Magee then went on to explain the transfer of territory process requires the County Committee on School District Organization to hold two public hearings, one in each of the

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization

Public Hearing Minutes

May 6, 2013

Approved Minutes

affected school districts. Tonight's public hearing is being held in the Redwood City Elementary School District while the hearing in the San Carlos School District is scheduled for May 14th.

At the conclusion of the public hearings, the Committee will assess what further information is needed to assist in their decision-making. Staff will prepare the requested information and bring it forward to the Committee at the next regular meeting. Ms. Magee reported that the Committee is well within its timeline if they find it necessary to take final action on the petition at a subsequent meeting in July or August.

Chairperson Stelzer then explained that during the hearing, the petitioner and representatives from each of the affected school districts have the opportunity to present information to the Committee and to ask and answer questions. Additionally, any member of the public who wishes to speak on this matter is also afforded an opportunity to speak. Mr. Stelzer invited anyone in the audience who wished to speak before the Committee to fill out a speaker card and return it to him.

Presentation by Chief Petitioner:

Chairperson Stelzer invited the Chief Petitioner to the podium.

One of the Chief Petitioners in this case, Mr. Robert Meyer, introduced himself and said he lives at 60 Loma Road. He then began his presentation directing the Committee's attention to his PowerPoint slides.

Mr. Meyer showed a school district boundary map and pointed out the location of Loma Road in reference to the two school district boundary lines. He indicated the seven addresses on the northern end of Loma Road that are the central to the transfer of territory request. Mr. Meyer explained that in the 1970's there was a landslide that cut Loma Road in half. He said that historically, Loma Road had been built up from the south at Palomar Park and over the years, the streets of Greenbrier and La Mesa also saw much development. He said these neighborhoods comprised the San Carlos School District community in that region. After the landslide when the road was obstructed, the houses south of La Mesa became part of the northern community.

Mr. Meyer pointed out the seven properties on the parcel map. He said the vertical serpentine line indicates Loma Road and that the area in question is comprised of 200 feet of road that provides these seven houses with vehicle access.

Mr. Stelzer asked Mr. Meyer to point out the spot of the landslide.

Mr. Meyer said Loma Road runs right along the serpentine line and then becomes straight. The landslide divide happened at the spot where the road straightens out.

Mr. Meyer continued that if a person were driving down from the north, he/she would see a dilapidated gate that was put up for the fire department to have access. Despite the existence of the gate, Mr. Meyer said the fire department would never use it because it includes a 60-foot long washed out section. The water that comes through the asphalt has already washed the road

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization

Public Hearing Minutes

May 6, 2013

Approved Minutes

away several times. From the Palomar Park side, there is about 60 feet of landfill that was put in place to originally build the road into a crevice. It had to be packed at least 20 feet. Because it wasn't reinforced, it washed out in 1972. The private property owner at the time actually put retaining walls on both sides. They then compacted it back up and took over that section of the road.

Mr. Meyer said that all of the addresses included in the petition are part of Palomar Park S101, unincorporated San Mateo County. He explained that he and a neighbor have been in the process of hooking up to the sewer and as a result are annexing into the City of San Carlos. He also said that two of the houses had already annexed over into San Carlos. In addition, the City of San Carlos is also taking over the road.

Mr. Meyer said he would now discuss the nine criteria by which the Committee will evaluate the petition.

Mr. Meyer began with Criterion One that states an adequate number of students must be enrolled in either district. Mr. Meyer said the data he found last February reflecting 2011-2012 enrollment data showed more than 3,000 students in the San Carlos Elementary School District and a little more than 9,000 students in Redwood City. He indicated there are four potential students who would be involved in the school district boundary change. One of those students is currently attending school in San Carlos. Given the small number of students involved in the transfer, he said both districts would maintain adequate enrollment.

Mr. Meyer then addressed the issue of community identity. He said the only community his family actively participates in is San Carlos. Most of the block parties and most of the kids that are their children's ages live along the two main streets on the San Carlos side, La Mesa and Greenbrier. He said historically the children in this neighborhood have attended the San Carlos School District schools, but the inter-district transfer policy has since changed. Now San Carlos uses a priority rating for accepting inter-district transfers while previous to that it seemed it was a liberal enough policy that 5 of the 7 households included children who attended San Carlos schools. As for the other two households, there's one family that moved in after their kids had completed their schooling and another family whose kids are still too young for school.

In reference to Criterion Three, Mr. Meyer said there are no school facilities along this 200-foot stretch. He does not believe there would be any changes in facilities for either school district.

Regarding Criterion Four, Mr. Meyer indicated the transfer of territory would not promote any racial or ethnic discrimination or segregation. Of the four potential students, two of them are mixed race. From what he can tell, this transfer of territory would not have much of an impact because there are, in fact, only four students.

Criterion Five references substantial increases in costs to the state as the result of a transfer. Mr. Meyer said he could only base that determination on the Revenue Limit numbers for San Carlos and for Redwood City that are within 2% of each other. He does not believe there is a substantial increase that would be caused by four students going one way or the other.

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing Minutes
May 6, 2013
Approved Minutes

Criterion Six is about promoting a sound education. Mr. Meyer indicated once again that with so few students affected, he does not believe it would impact either school district in any discernible way.

Criterion Seven asks whether there would be any significant impact on the school facilities. Mr. Meyer indicated one student is already attending Heather School in the first grade, while the younger students are in preschool. He does not see any impact on school facilities if the transfer were to be approved.

Criterion Eight says the proposed reorganization is primarily designed for purposes other than to significantly increase property values. Mr. Meyer acknowledged that in terms of property value, it's always hard to measure. He used the zip codes to research projected property value. He reported that his research showed property value on the Palomar Park side as 20% higher, but he also said it is almost impossible to separate out individual elements of property value. He expressed hesitation to say one-way or the other whether their property value would increase or not. Mr. Meyer added that other factors such as hooking up to the sewer would have a more significant impact on property value than transferring school districts.

For Criterion Nine, promoting sound fiscal management, Mr. Meyer again did not feel this transfer would have a significant impact for either school district.

Mr. Meyer concluded his presentation by summarizing the key points. He said these seven houses have been part of the San Carlos community for three decades now. After the landslide, the houses were cut off from the rest of Palomar Park and the children that have been living in these homes since have attended San Carlos schools. He reiterated the small number of households involved so he does not anticipate a major impact on either school district.

Mr. Stelzer asked members of the Committee if they had questions for Mr. Meyer.

Member Bamford asked Mr. Meyer to confirm that Heather School is in San Carlos. Mr. Meyer responded that yes, Heather School is in the San Carlos School District.

Ms. Bamford then asked if the student who is attending Heather School is attending via an inter-district transfer? Mr. Meyer said that yes, this student has been attending Heather since first grade on an inter-district transfer.

Mr. Stelzer asked for verification of when the landslide occurred. Mr. Meyer answered that he believes it was 1972, possibly 1974. Mr. Stelzer then asked if there had been any effort to repair the road?

Mr. Meyer answered that he thinks when the owners compacted it, that was an attempt to repair it. When the compacting of earth took more than 20 feet, they decided not to go further with it. Fire trucks will not travel over it; the fire department is afraid they would actually cause another landslide.

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing Minutes
May 6, 2013
Approved Minutes

Mr. Stelzer asked if anyone had additional questions.

Member Paulson said she had a comment regarding a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle that compares property values for properties in the San Carlos School District versus the Redwood City Elementary School District. The writer of the article estimated that changing districts, from Redwood City to San Carlos, adds an immediate \$200,000 to the value of the house. Mr. Dannis then asked if the article was referring to an information session that was held for realtors regarding property value in regards to school districts. Ms. Paulson indicated that yes, it was.

Mr. Dannis asked Mr. Meyer to clarify his understanding of the change that the San Carlos School District made in its inter-district transfer policy around priority rating. Mr. Meyer responded that he only became familiar with the change when he and his wife went to register their older daughter for school. He said the first year they applied, they asked both Redwood City and San Carlos School Districts which one they should apply to. He said the San Carlos School District staff said to just apply. He and his wife did that, and then midway through the process they discovered they had been rejected. It turned out that the seven houses at the end of this section of Loma Road weren't listed on either the San Carlos or the Redwood City maps. Mr. Meyer said if he'd understood better how it works, he would have investigated where his school taxes were going. In the end, he discovered that his property taxes were going to Redwood City.

At that point Mr. Meyer shared that the Redwood City Elementary School District said okay, here's what we are doing with the seven houses on the map so nobody else will get confused. They said they would do an automatic inter-district transfer if someone from these seven houses tried to enroll. Not long after that, the San Carlos School District decided to no longer accept inter-district transfers or to accept some, but only through a priority process. Mr. Meyer explained that those who receive priority status for inter-district transfers are San Carlos School District employees, families who have older siblings already attending, and City of San Carlos employees.

Mr. Dannis asked Mr. Meyer to confirm that the Redwood City Elementary School District said it would agree to any transfers from these seven houses?

Mr. Meyer responded that as he understands it, they offer an automatic transfer meaning if he asks for an inter-district transfer, it's an automatic okay that goes through in a day or so. Mr. Meyer said this is what happened last year.

Mr. Stelzer restated that there was no hindrance in regard to an inter-district transfer from Redwood City?

Mr. Meyer responded that there was no hindrance.

Mr. Stelzer thanked Mr. Meyer for his time and efforts.

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing Minutes
May 6, 2013
Approved Minutes

Presentation by the School Districts:

Mr. Stelzer invited Superintendent Christensen from the Redwood City Elementary School District to the podium.

Superintendent Christensen introduced herself and acknowledged Dennis McBride, a Redwood City Elementary School District trustee in the audience. Superintendent Christensen also introduced Claire Cunningham, County Counsel for the Redwood City School District.

Superintendent Christensen noted that her board did discuss the Loma Road petition at their last board meeting, and the consensus was that there was philosophical opposition to any transfer of territory. Superintendent Christensen explained that the potential alteration of school boundaries is a legally binding act and has far-reaching public consequences for many children beyond the houses that are actually under consideration tonight.

Superintendent Christensen said she drove up to the Loma Road petition site with the principal of Clifford School and the district's Director of Communications. She said she found the site interesting because she was envisioning a landslide with rocks and debris, but what she found was a small road similar to one that she'd actually driven on in a previous state that she lived in. She said she was curious how and why this road has been in this condition for so long. She said she thinks that would be a good thing for the Committee to explore. Superintendent Christensen did ask County Counsel to contact the County for clarification, and the County responded that it's considered a paper road and that it is the responsibility of the homeowners on Loma Road to repair it. Superintendent Christensen asked why nothing had been done to the road for more than 20 years. She said that could also be something the Committee might want to check into.

Superintendent said she drove from Clifford School to the seven houses in question, and determined it was about a six-minute drive. She also drove from Clifford School to Heather School and determined it was about a four-minute drive. Students at Heather only go through fourth grade, and then they go to Tierra Linda which is even further away than Clifford. Redwood City is a K-8 school district so students who are at Clifford would actually stay there all the way through grade 8.

Superintendent Christensen continued by saying she understands the concept of community identity, but she also believes that community identity is a very complex issue. It's more than where a house is located. It is her belief that the children on Loma Road could easily walk from one side of the slide area to the other, and therefore could play with children in the Palomar Park area. She said when she visited the site she walked through the whole area. The slide area itself appears to be stable and safe. But beyond children playing in the neighborhood, most are also involved in sports leagues and churches and all types of activities that cross community boundaries. She said the Redwood City district encompasses numerous cities besides just Redwood City. The district also includes parts of San Carlos, Woodside, Atherton, and Menlo Park. To say that community identity is just about Redwood City is not necessarily true.

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization

Public Hearing Minutes

May 6, 2013

Approved Minutes

Superintendent Christensen also said that community identity needs to be defined in combination with the identity of the school communities and take into account how they are organized. The Redwood City Elementary School District's identity is one of varied ethnic and socio-economic diversity. When the district moves students out of what she considers predominantly white, higher income neighborhoods into bordering districts that are predominantly white, she thinks it does have a negative impact on the district's community identity. And so while this proposal will not necessarily affect the identity of the San Carlos School District, she does think it would have a negative impact on the Redwood City Elementary School District.

Superintendent Christensen also mentioned the news article that appeared in the Chronicle that was referenced earlier by Committee member Paulson. She said she had brought copies for the Committee members and would ask Mr. Fox to pass them around. She said the article stipulates that the San Carlos homes that border Clifford School, the ones that are actually in the San Carlos School District are valued \$200,000 higher than homes in the Redwood City Elementary School District. She said it is difficult for her to separate the request for transfer of territory from the issue of property values.

Superintendent Christensen added that as Mr. Meyer acknowledged in his comments, the Redwood City Elementary School District has always been willing to provide inter-district transfers. In a previous situation when there were some parents who wanted to have their homes transferred into a different district, Redwood City offered them the alternate solution of inter-district transfers. Christensen said the district is not trying to capture people, but rather feels that people should be able to make a choice. However, the district does not want to lose the property that's encompassed in those homes. So when parents do request inter-district transfers, the district does agree to them. In this particular case, the San Carlos District was not able to accommodate inter-district transfer requests because their schools are overcrowded. Redwood City did agree to the transfer even though San Carlos did not, but it's unfair for the Redwood City School District to bear the burden of this permanent, irreversible loss to the district of these seven homes simply because another district doesn't want to allow the students to come in.

Superintendent Christensen said there is also a financial impact; it's not a huge one, but there is some. She said the district just recently, and for the first time in our history, passed a parcel tax. If we lost these properties, there would be a loss to the parcel tax. There are also two bonds that are on the residences in question—Bond A and Bond B. From her understanding the district doesn't take on additional burden, but all the other taxpayers in the Redwood City School District do. Their amounts would go up to make up for the loss of the revenue from those seven homes.

Superintendent Christensen added that when people buy homes, they should be cognizant of what school district the home is in. That's a decision that a homebuyer makes at that time. Even though this transfer of territory request does concern a very small number of homes, Superintendent Christensen said that as a district, they look at the cumulative effect of small transfers out of our district and how that sets a precedent. She indicated this was an even greater concern for the Redwood City District because of the number of predominantly wealthier, less diverse areas that run along its borders. Redwood City is a low-wealth district with boundaries

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization

Public Hearing Minutes

May 6, 2013

Approved Minutes

that are contiguous to the boundaries of a lot of wealthier districts. There have been requests in the past along those boundaries to transfer territory into higher wealth districts. And so while it might not impact our revenue limit, we do think there could be a loss of subsequent border areas if this continues.

Our district believes there should be several things that the Committee could investigate. Can the road be repaired? Are the neighbors willing to repair the road? Why is this transfer coming up now if this landslide happened in the 1970s? And if this transfer requires a vote or an election, who is fiscally responsible for paying for that election?

Mr. Stelzer asked the Committee members if they had any questions for Superintendent Christensen.

Ms. Bamford asked approximately how many homes are in the Redwood City Elementary School District?

Superintendent Christensen answered that they have about 25,000 parcels including all business. She does not know the exact number of homes in the district.

Mr. Stelzer asked what the per parcel assessment for bonds is?

Superintendent Christensen responded that she didn't have that information tonight. She does however know that the recently passed parcel tax is \$67.

Mr. Stelzer then asked if there had been any discussion between the two school boards and districts in regards to creating a priority for those particular parcels?

Superintendent Christensen said she has only had conversations with the Superintendent in San Carlos and that was quite a long time ago. She had suggested including these homes in an inter-district transfer zone, but she is unaware of any specific communication between the two boards on this matter.

As there were no further questions, Superintendent Christensen thanked the Committee members for their time.

Public Comment:

There were no additional members of the public wishing to speak.

Next Steps:

Mr. Stelzer announced that the next step is to convene the second of two public hearings that is scheduled for May 14th at 7:00 p.m. at Central Middle School in San Carlos.

Adjournment of Public Hearing:

Chairperson Stelzer adjourned the hearing at 7:55 p.m.