

San Mateo County Committee on School District Organization
Public Hearing Minutes
March 30, 2015

APPROVED MINUTES

Date: March 30, 2015

Place: Menlo Park City School District
181 Encinal Avenue
Atherton, CA 94027

County Committee on School District Organization Members Present:

Greg Dannis; Hilary Paulson; Laura Rich; George Robinson; Robert Stelzer; Marc Tarpenning; Melchior Thompson

County Committee on School District Organization Members Absent:

Virginia Bamford; Victor James; Bill Lock

Staff Present:

Kristina Paszek, Deputy County Counsel; Nancy Magee, Secretary to County Committee and Administrator for Board Support and Community Relations

Call to Order:

Chairperson Stelzer called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00 PM. and welcomed all members present. He explained the transfer of territory petition process involves at least two hearings. In the O'Connor Street Petition there would be exactly two hearings with the second one occurring the following Monday, April 6, 2015, in the Ravenswood City School District. Subsequent to the hearings, the Committee would then convene their regular meetings and deliberate and act on this matter.

Description of Petition

Nancy Magee introduced herself as SMCOE Administrator and Secretary to the County Committee. Ms. Magee then introduced Kristina Paszek, Deputy County Counsel who would be sitting with the Committee for this particular petition. She said Deputy Counsel Tim Fox who regularly sits with the Committee, also serves as school attorney for the Menlo Park City School District and so County Counsel's office determined it would be best to have another attorney sit with the Committee for this petition.

Ms. Magee continued by saying the O'Connor Street petition was received in the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools and after verification of signatures by the Elections Office and verification of parcel descriptions and maps by the Assessor's Office, the petition was forwarded to the County Committee on February 23, 2015. The petition requests the transfer of 31 homes on O'Connor Street in Menlo Park from the Ravenswood City School District to the Menlo Park City School District.

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Overview of Petition Process and Public Hearing

Ms. Magee explained the petition timeline requires the Committee to convene public hearings in each of the affected school districts within 60 days of the verified petition being presented to the Committee. Additionally, the Committee must take action on the petition within 120 days of the first public hearing. Ms. Magee said based on this timeline the Committee must take action by the end of July 2015.

Ms. Magee noted the Committee would hold their next regular meeting on May 4, 2015. The May meeting offers the first opportunity for the Committee to deliberate the facts and/or take action on the petition. Ms. Magee said the meeting would take place at 7:00 PM at the San Mateo County Office of Education.

Ms. Magee then described the sequence of possible actions once the Committee takes action to approve or deny the petition. Whether the Committee approves or denies the petition, any of the involved stakeholders has the opportunity to appeal the Committee's decision to the State Board of Education. In that event, the same petition is presented to the State Board but a new timeline and process begin. Ms. Magee said the appeal process could be a long one, lasting anywhere from one to two years.

If the Committee was to approve the petition but one or more of the involved school district boards has taken their own action to oppose the petition, then before the petition is granted final approval, an election must be held. Member Rich asked Ms. Magee to explain the election process in further detail.

Ms. Magee explained that prior to taking action on the petition, the Committee would determine the area of election. Typically the area of election includes the voters residing in the area directly affected by the petition, but it is within the purview of the Committee to expand the election area to include all or part of any of the involved school districts if they so decide.

Ms. Magee then concluded by explaining that in the event the Committee takes action to deny the petition, the process is considered complete unless one or more of the parties chooses to file an appeal.

Presentation by Petitioners

Chairperson Stelzer invited the Chief Petitioners, Susan Stacy Keller, John Brady Barksdale, Lancing Tyler Scriven, and Ken Hoyle to make their presentation to the Committee. Mr. Barksdale began by thanking the Committee and their neighbors who came in support of the petition. Mr. Barksdale introduced himself and each of the Chief Petitioners followed suit.

Mr. Barksdale said he, his fellow petitioners, and other O'Connor Street residents have come before the Committee tonight to ask that they approve a petition to move their 31 homes in the Willows neighborhood in Menlo Park from the Ravenswood City School District into the Menlo

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Park City School District. He said that by granting this petition the Committee would allow O'Connor Street to be restored to its natural and original boundaries.

Mr. Barksdale then provided the Committee with an historical overview of the Willows neighborhood as it relates to O'Connor Street. He said in 1983 the entirety of the Willows neighborhood was part of the Ravenswood City School District. That previous November of 1982, the Willows community had submitted a petition for the neighborhood to be annexed into the Menlo Park City School District. This petition was ultimately approved and all the homes of the Willows neighborhood that were located within the city of Menlo Park at the time of the petition were transferred into the Menlo Park City School District.

Mr. Barksdale then went on to explain how the petitioners' 31 homes on O'Connor Street were excluded from this annexation. He said back in 1982 the Menlo Park City School District used the Menlo Park city boundaries to establish its school district boundary lines. At the time the Willows Petition was submitted, the O'Connor Street homes had not yet been annexed into the city of Menlo Park. This annexation did not occur until 19 days after the Willows Petition had been filed. Mr. Barksdale explained that by the time the petition was approved in 1983, the homes on O'Connor Street were in fact, newly annexed into Menlo Park's city boundaries.

Mr. Barksdale went on to say that in regards to the nine criteria outlined in Education Code 357753, the O'Connor Street petition meets all nine. The petitioners then addressed each of the criteria, one by one.

1. The reorganized districts will be adequate in terms of number of pupils enrolled.

Mr. Barksdale said both school districts meet the state of California minimum requirement for enrollment of 901 students.

2. The districts are each organized on the basis of a substantial community identity.

Mr. Barksdale said the community identity of the O'Connor Street residents is the Willows neighborhood and Menlo Park. He further discussed the many factors that come into play, including consistent architecture; use of parks and other recreational areas; travel and traffic patterns; geopolitical factors such as sharing the same electoral district and fire and police services; and frequenting Menlo Park businesses, Mr. Barksdale said the residents of O'Connor Street find their community identity within the city of Menlo Park.

3. The proposal will result in an equitable division of property and facilities of the original district or districts.

Mr. Scriven said there would be no impact on property or facilities as a result of this petition.

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4. The reorganization of the districts will preserve each affected district's ability to educate students in an integrated environment and will not promote racial or ethnic discrimination or segregation.

Mr. Scriven explained that residents on O'Connor Street are quite diverse and directed the Committee members to note the demographic data represented in the presentation slide. This data indicates the territory transfer would not impact the ethnic diversity of the Menlo Park City School District.

5. Any increase in costs to the state as a result of the proposed reorganization will be insignificant and otherwise incidental to the reorganization.

Mr. Scriven said there would be no increase in costs to the state because Menlo Park City School District is a Basic Aid school district and the funding source is local property taxes.

6. The proposed reorganization will continue to promote sound education performance and will not significantly disrupt the educational programs in the districts affected by the proposed reorganization.

Mr. Scriven said that the 31 homes involved in the petition currently include six school-aged children, a miniscule proportion of the district's overall student population. The impact to class size and teacher-student ratio would similarly be nearly zero.

7. Any increase in school facilities costs as a result of the proposed reorganization will be insignificant and otherwise incidental to the reorganization.

Mr. Scriven explained that Menlo Park is projected to receive funds from Measure M in 2015-16 to fund the new Upper Laurel campus. If the petition is granted, the O'Connor Street homes would also be assessed the same Menlo Park City School District bonds and parcel taxes as other residents within the district.

8. The proposed reorganization is primarily designed for purposes other than to significantly increase property values.

Mr. Scriven said many of the residents of O'Connor Street have been in their homes for years and that none of the residents have any particular intention to sell their homes any time soon. He pointed out data in the presentation slide indicating the fact that the homes on both sides of O'Connor Street have increased in value at a rate greater than that of the overall Willows neighborhood. The petitioners attribute this fact to the real estate trends in general and not to an affiliation with a particular school district. Increased property values are not a motivating factor in the petition.

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9. The proposed reorganization will continue to promote sound fiscal management and not cause a substantial negative effect on the fiscal status of the proposed district or any existing district affected by the proposed reorganization.

Mr. Hoyle indicated there would be little financial impact to either school district if the transfer were to occur. In the Menlo Park City School District spending per student would decrease by less than one tenth of one percent.

In consideration of the long-term effect in relation to the number of students attending MPCSD schools, Mr. Hoyle said one way to understand this would be to take the existing six students and divide that number by the 31 homes. This calculates to one quarter of one student per household. Multiplying this forward into the future, the number of students could grow from six students to seven students over the next several years.

Regarding the financial aspect, Mr. Hoyle said Menlo Park City School District would see increased revenues from property taxes and new tax measures being implemented in the fall. With six additional students there would also be additional contributions to the Menlo Park Education Foundation and respective Parent Teacher Organizations.

Ms. Keller concluded by stating that the O'Connor Street Petition satisfies all nine of the state's criteria.

Chairperson Stelzer then asked the Committee members if they had any questions for the petitioners. Mr. Stelzer noted the six school-aged children currently living in the petition area and asked if there were any additional children under the age of five among the petitioner families. Ms. Keller indicated there were a total 13, soon to be 14, children living in homes included in the petition. She said there were six school-aged children plus two students already attending MPCSD, and then six children below the age of five. Member Rich asked how two of the children were already attending the district. Ms. Keller responded that the children's mother lives within the district boundaries.

Mr. Stelzer noted the petitioners had presented financial information in regards to Menlo Park City School District, but he wondered if they had done any financial projections as to the impact on the Ravenswood City School District.

Ms. Keller indicated that yes, there would be some, but she did not have the numbers tonight. The petitioners were preparing to address this at the Ravenswood Public Hearing. Mr. Hoyle stated it would be under \$5,000 total, but they would have the exact numbers ready for the next hearing.

Hearing no further questions, Mr. Stelzer thanked the petitioners for their presentation.

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Presentation by School Districts

Ravenswood City School District

Chairperson Stelzer invited Dr. Gloria Hernandez-Goff to the podium. Dr. Hernandez-Goff thanked the Committee and community members for their interest in this petition. She then said the Ravenswood City School District School Board reviewed and discussed the petition at their board meeting last week and the Board took action to oppose the petition. She said staff has been directed to compose a resolution for the Board to adopt at their April meeting.

She also confirmed that the district would be ready with a formal presentation to the Committee at next week's public hearing. Mr. Stelzer asked the Committee if there were any questions for Superintendent Hernandez-Goff. There were none, and Mr. Stelzer thanked the superintendent for her remarks.

Menlo Park City School District

Chairperson Stelzer then invited Superintendent Dr. Maurice Ghysels of the Menlo Park City School District to the podium. Dr. Ghysels thanked the Committee for their time. He explained the Menlo Park City School District would not make a formal presentation at tonight's public hearing, but would be working over the next week to gather information and inform their Board. Dr. Ghysels then introduced Ahmad Sheikholeslami to provide some highlights of the most recent discussion regarding the petition with the MPCSD School Board.

Mr. Sheikholeslami explained that staff had reviewed the highlights of the O'Connor Street petition and the process timeline with the trustees. Based on that interaction, the trustees had requested that staff explore further about particular aspects of the petition and then prepare a recommendation for the Board to consider at its April 14th school board meeting.

Among the concerns expressed by the MPCSD trustees was the continuing erosion of diversity and property tax revenue for the Ravenswood City School District as well as its increased reliance on state funding. They also asked staff to consider enrollment and space restrictions in the Menlo Park City School District. The trustees expressed concerns with establishing a precedent regarding territory transfers into the district.

Mr. Sheikholeslami said he wanted to bring a few additional points forward including the fact that the 1983 boundaries were set by the petitioners and not the school district. He said the district does have a concern for the racial diversity of Menlo Park City and Ravenswood City school districts moving forward as well as concern for the erosion of funding in Ravenswood. He said the Committee could expect a board resolution reflecting these topics after their April board meeting. Dr. Ghysels thanked the Committee and the petitioners for their efforts and their time.

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Public Comment

Chairperson Stelzer invited the public to come forward at this time with their comments.

The following nine individuals spoke in favor of the O'Connor Street Petition

John Barksdale
Kim Chun
Petra Fenzl
Ken Hoyle
Tom Jackson
Adela Mazzon
Purvi Mody
Vicky Rundorff
Lansing Tyler Scriven

Chairperson Stelzer thanked all those members of the public who offered their comments.

Next Steps

Chairperson Stelzer asked what items the Committee might request of staff for further clarification. Member Tarpenning asked that staff confirm the tax roll numbers and Member Rich clarified that she had asked for an accounting of the homes located within the city of Menlo Park that are in the Ravenswood City School District. Member Dannis asked for an independent historical overview of petitions in this area. Member Thompson asked again for a more in-depth financial study. Ms. Magee confirmed that staff would deliver an independent analysis of the issues at the May 4th meeting.

Adjournment of Public Hearing

Chairperson Stelzer reminded all in attendance that the next public hearing would be held at the Ravenswood City School District Monday, April 6, 2015 at 7:00 PM.

The public hearing was adjourned at 8:02 PM.