



STAFF REPORT

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: James C. Hardy, City Manager *JCH*

Date: March 2, 2009

Subject: Review of San Mateo-Foster City School District's Formal Request to Begin the Process of Identifying a Potential Site for a Fourth Elementary School in Foster City

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council, by minute order, provide direction relative to the San Mateo-Foster City School District's formal request to begin the process of identifying a potential site for a fourth elementary school in Foster City. Based on Council direction, staff will draft a letter, to be signed by the Mayor, to the School District responding to their request.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to actual and projected increases in the enrollment of elementary school-age children, the San Mateo-Foster City School District has been exploring alternatives as to how to provide the school classrooms plus auxiliary spaces and infrastructure for the additional students. Based on the outcome of a series of focus groups held in Foster City, the School Administration recommended both short-term solutions and long-term solutions to accommodate Foster City students in Foster City schools. The short-term solutions involve adding temporary portable classrooms to the Brewer Island and Audubon school sites. The long-term solution involves the construction of a fourth elementary school in Foster City as the preferred alternative. The School Board reviewed these recommendations at its February 5th meeting and then approved them at its February 19th meeting. The School Board further directed that a letter be sent to the City of Foster City requesting "to begin the process of identifying a potential site for a fourth elementary school in Foster City" and "to receive a response from the City regarding the City's interest and willingness to work with the District in order to identify potential sites within the next two months and no later than April 30, 2009." City Council direction is needed in order to prepare a response to the School District.

10.2

BACKGROUND

After the City became aware last year that there was a problem with school capacity due to an unanticipated increase in school enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year, there were several meetings between representatives of the City Council and the District Board as well as the staff of both the City and the School District. The purpose of these meetings was to begin an open dialogue with the School District relative to these important issues. Members of the City Council and City staff have also attended several of the School Board meetings in order to stay abreast of the process being followed by the School District to address these issues and to be informed as to the recommendations being made to and approved by the District Board. City staff has also been responsive to requests for information from the School District staff. For example, Assistant Superintendent Joan Rosas sent a letter to my attention formally requesting "information from you regarding any remaining land that is zoned for school purposes within the boundaries of Foster City." (See attached letter dated September 24, 2008.) I provided a reply enclosing the Zoning Map for Foster City which showed all the sites that are zoned for public facilities (which would include schools) and "in the spirit of full disclosure even though it was not requested", I indicated that the City also owns a vacant 4-acre site located between Beach Park Blvd. and the levee at the terminus of Halibut Street that is currently zoned CM-PD. (See attached letter dated October 2, 2008).

For further background information, please refer to the reports that the School District Administration prepared for consideration by the San Mateo-Foster City School District Board on February 5, 2009 and February 19, 2009. Attached to the February 5th report are the "Recommendations for Impacted School Enrollment in Foster City—Audubon, Brewer Island and Foster City". The Board received this report at its meeting on February 5th and then took action approving the Administration's recommendations at its meeting on February 19th. The Board then directed that a letter be sent to the City notifying the City of Foster City of its actions and making a formal request to begin the process of identifying a potential site for a fourth elementary school in Foster City. The attached letter dated February 24, 2009 was sent by Penderly Clark, Superintendent, to my attention. A response from the City is being requested.

ANALYSIS

As you are aware, the City Council as part of its adopted Policy Calendar for 2009 added Item 7A as a priority issue: "Continue the Open Dialogue with the San Mateo-Foster City School District and Closely Monitor Their Response to the Issue of Increasing School Enrollment and School Overcrowding." Consistent with this policy priority, this matter has been placed on your agenda for your review and direction.

In responding to the letter sent by the School District, staff recommends that the City Council request answers to a number of questions that it believes are needed in order for the City to achieve a better understanding of the District's proposals so that the City

Council can properly evaluate the School District's request. If the City Council agrees with this approach, questions in the response letter could include the following:

1. What is meant by "the District will need to receive a response from the City regarding the City's interest and willingness to work with the District in order to identify potential sites", especially given the information the City already provided to the School District last October?
2. Is the School District looking just at property owned by the City or is it also looking at property that is privately owned? For City-owned property, how does the School District propose to compensate the City for the acquisition of its property?
3. What is the funding source for this fourth elementary school? Does the budget and funding source include the costs of acquiring the land as well as constructing the school? If the funding source is Measure L, has the School District obtained an opinion from its Bond Counsel regarding the legality to use Measure L funds and if so, can the District provide the City with a copy of this opinion?
4. What analysis has been done regarding accommodating students on property in Foster City that is already owned by the School District? Has the School District considered constructing multi-story buildings on its existing sites as an alternative?
5. What is the impact of this projected increase in enrollment on Bowditch Middle School and will added capacity be needed at this site?
6. What are the long-term plans for school classrooms (e.g., how many will be located in permanent buildings, in permanent relocatables, in temporary portables, etc.) and auxiliary spaces at each of the existing sites? How does this planned capacity then translate into a shortage of classrooms and therefore, the need for a fourth school site?
7. Based on this shortfall in capacity, what type of school does the School District believe it needs to construct and what is the approximate acreage and other site requirements for a fourth school to be safe and functional?
8. What are the requirements and limitations imposed by the State of California, the School District and others for siting public elementary schools?
9. How confident is the School District in the accuracy of their future enrollment projections? What factors could affect these projections either positively or negatively? What impact does the recently signed State budget and Federal stimulus package have on the School District's school capacity assumptions (e.g., class sizes, etc.) and proposed capital project plans?
10. What specific information does the School Board need in order to make a decision by September, 2009?

These questions can be modified as deemed appropriate by the City Council. Also, does the City Council need any other information from the School District in order to understand and evaluate the School District's request for assistance from the City? If so, what questions would you include in the response letter?

Based on City Council direction, staff will prepare a response letter to the School District to be signed by the Mayor on behalf of the City Council.

Attachments: Letter from the San Mateo-Foster City School District dated
February 24, 2009
School District Report for the February 19, 2009 Board Meeting
School District Report for the February 5, 2009 Board Meeting
Letter from City Manager Jim Hardy dated October 2, 2008
Letter from Assistant Superintendent Joan Rosas dated
September 24, 2008