



City/School Liaison Committee Summary Meeting Minutes



Regular Meeting
March 16, 2023

The City-School Liaison Committee of the City of Palo Alto met on this date in the Community Meeting Room at 8:38 A.M.

Present: City of Palo Alto Representatives

Julie Lythcott-Haims, Chair, City of Palo Alto
Pat Burt, Council Member, City of Palo Alto
Chantal Cotton Gaines, Deputy City Manager, City of Palo Alto

Palo Alto Unified School District Representatives

Shounak Dharap, Board Member, Palo Alto Unified School District
Lana Conaway, Assistant Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Julie Lythcott-Haims called the meeting to order and asked the staff present to introduce themselves.

REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Open Forum/Public Communications

Ken Horowitz emphasized the importance of this committee in dealing with a lot of issues. He wanted to know that there are discussions going on between the City and School Board regarding Cubberley.

2. Minutes Approval

MOTION: Board Member Dharap moved, seconded by Council Member Burt, to approve minutes from the February 16, 2023, meeting.

MOTION PASSED: 3-0

SUMMARY MINUTES

Chair Julie Lythcott-Haims believed the minutes of the previous meeting did not convey enough information or substance about the meeting.

Board Member Shounak Dharap stated there has been a struggle on the Board to strike a balance between minutes that were too voluminous and bare bones.

Council Member Pat Burt questioned if committee meeting minutes were only action minutes.

Deputy City Clerk Vinh Nguyen stated action minutes are the official minutes of the record but longer summary minutes are generally transcribed as well. In the past, summary minutes had not been utilized for this committee but if the committee members wished summary minutes to be transcribed, it could be arranged.

Chair Lythcott-Haims preferred to try having the summary minutes.

3. Updates

a. Palo Alto Unified School District

Assistant Superintendent Lana Conaway gave updates related to the priority areas in the school district. There have been recent updates to the Board. There has been a heavy focus on mental health, steadily building an in-house model to put putting services in the hands of students. There are mental health associates at every elementary school, middle school wellness centers, and high school. The goal moving into next year is to expand the program and bring services by outside contractors inside. The biggest barrier to care is that students have not developed trust with the provider and are less likely to seek out support when necessary. Most exciting is a partnership with TDH, which provides 24/7 care for students on demand. The goal is to have high-quality mental health therapists in the wellness centers at each middle school to serve students. Work around literacy has been the biggest area of success. There is an effort to shift the way reading is taught in attempt to boost literacy rates at all levels. Healthy attendance has been the biggest challenge. The District is trying to identify why students are not coming to school. There is concern about the impact of attendance rates on mental health and academic achievement. Regarding equity, the SWIFT (Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation) Plan was recently adopted with efforts toward developing equity literacy, identifying culturally responsive and relevant ways to teach students, and ensuring all students are thriving in the district.

Chair Julie Lythcott-Haims asked about the percentage of truancy.

Assistant Superintendent Conaway stated the measure used is chronic absenteeism, which does not take into account the reason a student may be absent. It is difficult to tease apart which part of the problem is truancy versus students who legitimately need to stay home. There are a lot of factors, including caution about illness coming out of COVID and students

SUMMARY MINUTES

taking initiative for mental health breaks. The work is to figure out the families that are struggling across the board and determine the root cause to help support those families.

Board Member Shounak Dharap stated that many people move to Palo Alto for the schools. Excellence in schools is important to all community members, and a debate about acceleration has been ongoing for years. The Board has expressed an ironclad priority for equity and mental health. He stated he had drafted a letter about Cubberley on behalf of the Board to the Mayor and Vice Mayor. It was an invitation for proposals on Cubberley, laying out the District's position, constraints, and ideas. The District is happy to work with the City on a deal that meets the constraints and desires of both. He was optimistic about that. The District desires to preserve 20 of the 35 acres for a future school and cannot put a bond on the ballot to raise money for a community center. There are viable options within those limits.

Deputy City Manager Chantal Cotton Gaines asked where the public would be able to see the letter.

Board Member Dharap responded that it would be added to the Cubberley page on the website.

Chair Lythcott-Haims questioned the impetus for the letter.

Board Member Dharap stated different board members may have different reasons but he felt it was clear that one reason progress had not been made on Cubberley was that there had not been a forum in which to have a real discussion about what the Board wants or needs.

Chair Lythcott-Haims felt the work toward mental health changes was a terrific improvement. She asked how the City could strengthen this effort.

Assistant Superintendent Conaway stated it was important that families know there are services available in the community. She felt any opportunity to talk about the importance of focusing on mental health was important.

Council Member Pat Burt was surprised there was no mention of Project Safety Net, a forum where all the different community agencies and entities involved with mental health and suicide prevention have been collaborating. He felt that since PAUSD moved on their own initiatives, their engagement with Project Safety Net has diminished over the years. This program is already supported by the City and County, and the District is supposed to be a partner. He suggested inviting Project Safety Net back for a substantive discussion about this.

Chair Lythcott-Haims believed that highlighted the fact there were myriad efforts and attempts toward this issue: Project Safety Net, Youth Community Service, allcove, and other efforts. She would love to see a table at the upcoming Palo Alto Youth Council's Mental Health Fair in

SUMMARY MINUTES

Mitchell Park where people can learn about the District's wellness centers to create a greater awareness of the network.

Council Member Burt felt the Board's letter about Cubberley was valuable and gave necessary clarity on the District's constraints. He believed it was prudent to reserve the 20 acres for future district needs.

Chair Lythcott-Haims praised the District for being number one in the nation.

b. City of Palo Alto

Council Member Pat Burt reported a big spike in utility costs this winter. The increase in gas was tied to market fluctuations, and the cost increase on electric was because hydroelectric power was not produced at traditional rates during the drought. The City is looking at means to help bridge those costs for the District. Caltrain received its remaining \$375M to complete the electrification system, to be completed in a year and a half. The City also adopted a new firearms regulation that restricts firearms in public facilities. It was enabled to include schools, but the City will work with the District to have that as part of the program. A narrow majority of Council supported prohibiting E-bikes from open space areas and next year will reconsider allowing class 1 E-bikes and instead looking at speed limits for all bikes in open spaces. Mayor Kou appointed an hoc committee with Stanford to work on a range of issues, including taxation of faculty-owned housing.

Deputy City Manager Chantal Cotton Gaines updated on engagement opportunities. There is a quiet zone study for Caltrain on March 23 at 6 P.M. at the Arrillaga Family Recreation Center. At cityofpaloalto.org/engage, there are opportunities to provide feedback on several topics.

4. Presentation from the Safe Routes to School Team (Annual SRTS Report)

Safe Routes to School Coordinator Jose Palma shared an overview of the 2021-2022 school year, the post pandemic response to parents, some PAUSD restrictions related to the pandemic, education adjustments due to the pandemic, information about the new community outreach tool, and an overview of outcomes and data trends. He reviewed the SRTS mission and goals. During the pandemic, more parents were driving children to school. The SRTS staff and PAUSD staff conducted walk and bike audits during the reopening periods to ensure biking and walking to and from campus were improved. The pandemic also impacted parent volunteers, and the Safe Routes program delivered education via online programs and Zoom. Staff debuted a new rodeo scheduling software program. Outdoor education and materials were provided at public parks and near schools. The SRTS partnership also implemented several programs to support families from underrepresented and economically adverse communities. He presented an update on the five-year plan, with 86% completion of year four objectives. He reviewed travel data, including the PAUSD bike count percentages.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Council Member Pat Burt highlighted the phenomenal progress made since 1985 with Safe Routes to School.

Safe Routes to School Coordinator Palma explained that statistics for driving are higher than in 2021 district wide and listed factors contributing to driving. The next steps are a zero-waste bike rodeo model, updated bike rodeo course maps, and supporting PTA volunteer recruitment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ashley Lien, parent of two elementary school students, appreciated the education for children regarding pedestrian-bike safety and the bike rodeo teaching how to bike to school safely together. Changing community habits is not easy, and the earlier children receive this education, the more they can do this for their physical and mental health. It is also a good opportunity for families to gather together.

Council Member Burt felt this was an outstanding program, a national model that many other communities have used to drive their mode share programs for students to get to school in safer, healthier ways. One of the Council priorities is public health and safety, and safety is recognized as the primary inhibition to greater mode share adoption. The update of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan is commencing, looking at all the programs, initiatives, and capital investments toward improving those systems. He requested the District elevate its commitment to participation in the BPTP and grade separations and in the SRTS program. Prior to COVID, there was an increase every year in the percentage of students biking and walking to school, and he wanted to get back on this path.

Board Member Shounak Dharap believed this was an opportunity for synergy between the District and City. The District has committed to this ideal with the addition of bike racks and making campuses more bike friendly. He hoped the 2021 dip was an anomaly and things would start to pick up again over the next year or two.

Chair Julie Lythcott-Haims added that mental health is enhanced by getting out in nature, exercising, and taking time to slow down on a bike or walking rather than riding in a car. There are equity issues involved regarding who is more likely to be able to be driven in a vehicle versus who has to walk or bike because parents are already at work. She stated that recently being on a bicycle for the first time in ten years made her look at the city differently. She noted the imperative to separate the train from the road is coming and that the City needs to get in front of that so that kids can get to school in a timely fashion.

Council Member Burt suggested including studies about mental health in relation to riding into the City's and School District's focus on mental health. The Climate Plan quantifies the mode shift goal as part of greenhouse gas reduction, and increase in the biking percentage is needed to hit goals. He acknowledged the importance of community volunteers as this program would not have happened without them.

SUMMARY MINUTES

Transportation Manager Sylvia Star-Lack noted that there is a City-School Transportation Safety Committee where parent volunteers sit with city staff, PAUSD staff, police, and important stakeholders. There will be opportunities for that committee to add its voice to the development of the BPTP. Equity is one of the formal pillars of the SRTS program. In this community, it is actually flipped in that it is often the most privileged who are able to bike. Those who are unable are those who do not have access, cannot read the maps as it is not in their language, or have to cross 101 and do not feel it is safe.

Safe Routes to School Coordinator Palma added that during the pandemic, he worked to provide a Zoom PowerPoint explanation about the SRTS program for families who are English learners. He is working to inform families about nonprofits that help provide bikes or helmets.

Council Member Burt mentioned the bridge over the creek at Newell, enabling biking for East Palo Alto students, is due to be replaced starting in a year and short-term bus access may be needed before returning to a safer and better bike route. He was interested in looking into E-bike subsidies for low-income households. He felt E-bikes and 3-wheeled cargo bikes were a bridge for many more people to have access and feel safe on bikes. Promoting that will be important as they enable people with other needs to bike comfortably, easily, and safely.

5. Discussion of Committee Purpose and City-PAUSD Collaborations

Chair Julie Lythcott-Haims proposed carrying this item over to the next meeting.

6. Future Business

Discussion of Committee Purpose and City-PAUSD Collaborations will be carried over to the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 A.M.