

March 10, 2023

Palo Alto City Council
250 Hamilton Ave
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Re: Invitation for Cubberley Development Proposals

Dear Colleagues,

What's happening with Cubberley?

Within the shared canon of our two governmental bodies, few questions evoke the same wearied engagement as this one. It's a perennial topic at City/School Liaison Committee meetings (where it is given a light touch) and during election-season candidate forums (where the response is a touch heavy-handed). It has been the subject of meetings, workshops, listening sessions, town halls, and a master plan, all while the site has remained relatively unchanged since the school was closed on February 6, 1979. As the crumbling infrastructure belies the rich panoply of community-oriented programs that now inhabit the site, there is general agreement that Cubberley's current use is unsustainable without significant capital improvements.

We, the PAUSD Board of Education, shoulder some of the responsibility for the restrained pace of Cubberley's redevelopment plan. But our caution is well-founded. As fiduciaries of the school district and trustees of students present and future, we have a fundamental duty to ensure we do not prejudice their interests by repeating the mistakes of our past selves—when we gave up land during a period of declining enrollment only to find ourselves in financial dire straits once the need for a new campus inevitably arose years later.

Indeed, we found ourselves with a student-driven need for the site just this past year. Two of our elementary schools, Palo Verde and Hoover, are undergoing sitewide redevelopment. Accordingly, we designated a temporary school campus on the Cubberley site that will be in use through 2025 to serve those students for the duration of the construction.

Nevertheless, we understand and fully support the City's desire to move forward on development of a portion of the site to realize the vision of a fully-fledged Cubberley Community Center. The polished incarnation of this community gem will surely benefit our joint stakeholders and serve as a resource for the District's students and families.



PALO ALTO
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Our enthusiasm to support the City's endeavor is caveated by two constraints: (1) we have a desire to retain ownership over roughly 20 of the 35 acres for future school use, the exact nature of which cannot be determined until the need for such a school arises; and (2) we cannot ask the voters to pass a school bond to fund a community center development, as such a bond may only be used to fund school construction as specifically enumerated in Education Code section 15100.

Within those constraints lies a viable path forward. We are open to a deal that transfers ownership or development control over at least 7 additional acres to the City, leaving the City with a total of 15 or more acres to freely develop without the constraints placed upon us. (For reference, the current indoor space at Cubberley amounts to roughly 1.5 acres.) While our preference is to retain 20 acres for future school development, we will not automatically foreclose a deal that might include a transfer of more than 7 acres. Furthermore, nothing in such a deal would preclude the City from continuing to lease the remaining acreage from the District until such a time as the need arises for a new school. Moreover, we are flexible about the exact location of the City's acreage based on the needs of the City's planned development, subject only to a few limited considerations for the future school site like street access and neighborhood proximity. We are also open to the form of the deal—whether it's a land swap, ground lease, or some other vehicle for land transfer.

As your neighbor and partner, we therefore formally invite you to submit one or more land transfer proposals for our consideration within the parameters discussed above. We acknowledge that your process for community feedback and Council consensus may take time, but we eagerly await the next step in Cubberley's future.

Proposals can be submitted directly to Superintendent Don Austin for placement by the Board's Agenda Setting Committee on the Board's agenda.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shounak Dharap', enclosed within a large, loopy oval.

Shounak Dharap
Board Trustee

On behalf of the Palo Alto Unified School District Board of Education*

*Duly authorized under Board Bylaw 9010 to communicate this letter on behalf of the Board.