

Planning Commission mulls school regulation changes

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Portland Planning Commission last month endorsed two changes in the zoning code regulating school activities, but balked at a third change.

Most Portland schools and churches are on land zoned for residential use. To operate they must obtain a conditional use permit, which states in broad terms what they are allowed to do and sometimes set conditions.

A group of community activists, many of them from southwest Portland, have accused the Portland School District of violating its conditional use permits, and the district itself has complained that the system is burdensome and unworkable.

Collins View neighborhood activist Dixie Johnston, one of those who has accused the district of violating the code, testified, "Our community has been through a school closure. It was very painful, we're still dealing with it, and it's still kicking us in the teeth. What we all want to see is a sense of community, but we don't do a very good job of that. We become focused and selfish."

Johnston suggested letting City workers take a day a month off work to work on public schools. She told the Commission, "I do want to commend City staff and how they've handled a

very difficult situation. I like the tenor of the discussion and feel we're going in the right direction. I'm very grateful for your intelligent questions."

When a school or church is vacant for three years, it loses its conditional use status. The Portland Bureau of Development Services staff proposed, and the Commission endorsed, a change that would extend the grace period to five years.

They also agreed to abolish a requirement that a school seek an amendment to its conditional use if its enrollment increases; they retained a requirement that an amendment is needed if the school adds more than 1,500 square feet of floor area.

The third amendment would allow any changes in age or grade level, without public review, for schools teaching kindergarten through eighth grade. Citizen activists have made official complaints to the Bureau of Development Services, charged with enforcing the zoning code, concerning grade changes at nine Portland public schools. The amendment would nullify the complaints against all but two of these schools.

Commission members were uneasy about both the substance and procedure here. Commission member Chris Smith said, "Putting everything from kindergarten to eighth grade in one bucket doesn't work for me. The transporta-

tion impacts are different." He added, "What's most frustrating is that this is indefensible from a citizen's point of view. We're making the complaints go away by changing the code."

Commission member Irma Valdez said, "We're being asked to bless what (the school district) has already done." Commission member Howard Shapiro said, "I'm not comfortable with this at all."

Mike Liefeld, who has been dealing with the code compliance complaints for the Bureau of Development Services, told the Commission, "We're trying to do what's reasonable."

Deborah Stein, District Planning Manager for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said that the current code has proved cumbersome for everyone involved. "Things simply can't work the way the code is written," she said.

Earlier in the hearing, the Commission experienced some frustration during interaction with Portland School Board member David Wynde. The "point person" on the board for dealing with school facilities, Wynde said that a recent evaluation of school buildings revealed "The major systems in most are in need of replacement. There's a need to remodel, repair or replace all of them."

A defined set of projects in this direction has a total cost of \$270 million. Things that need to be done in the next

12 to 18 months would cost \$80 million. The district recently spent \$12 million on its most immediate needs, "and we borrowed to do it."

Smith said that in some ways, the City and the District have "overlapping jurisdictions. Schools are often the hub of the community. If they are closed or moved, it has a tremendous impact. When you're considering closing a school you hold a public hearing, but City Council should also be involved."

Wynde replied, "I think you've identified an issue: overlapping jurisdictions. We're committed as entities to exercising our legitimate rights and responsibilities while cooperating with other jurisdictions." He added, "We've met the requirements for collaboration" with City government.

Shapiro noted that the City and its citizens have "a substantial investment in our schools. You took a strong position on what Schools have to do to protect their best interests. I urge you to soften your position in the interest of the common good."

Wynde replied, "I think I agree with what you're saying, the spirit is there." However, he added, "When you need to find \$32 million to balance your budget, that's why we're elected, and we wouldn't be happy if other jurisdictions told us how to do that. We expect others to do their job, and we will do ours."

Community health is focus of OHSU School of Nursing class

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

This year's Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Nursing class studied the young and the old in southwest Portland, and provided services along the way.

For the third consecutive year, Launa Rae Mathews has been using the community around the OHSU campus as a living study area for her senior nursing class.

One group of four students has been studying the problems of low-income children and families, and has been working with Head Start, the Southwest Community Health Center, and the YWCA After School Program.

They worked with the Casey Eye Institute and Doernbecher Children's Hospital to provide dental exams, vision and hearing screenings, nutritional

assessments and health education. They also provided mentoring and homework help for children in the YWCA program.

In return, children and families in these programs helped the staff study local health issues. The area's strengths are parent support groups, and social service resources. Needs not fully met are a lack of affordable housing, childcare and transportation. This last contributes to problems of having access to healthy food, jobs and health care for parents.

"Your ability to use resources can be dependent on getting basic needs met," student Barbara Whistler told *The Post*. A finding not surprising to local residents is that the area lacks basic transportation services such as sidewalks. Whistler added that even in wealthy communities, "Poverty can be hidden."

Another five students worked with

Neighborhood House and the Loaves and Fishes Meals on Wheels program on senior health issues. One of these was medication management, "which has long been identified as a major medical problem," student Vida Manavisadeh told *The Post*.

Another issue was "socialized relationships," which she defined as lives with "a limited number of social contacts," and a lack of "engagement" with the ones they have. "I didn't realize how big an issue it was," she said. Where such problems exist, she said, Loaves and Fishes drivers play an important part because they get to know their clients, and can be a resource to refer them to help when they need it.

Capitol Highway Project

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a traditional "T"-style intersection in which traffic comes to a stop at Southwest Vermont Street and 30th Avenue.

The \$1.7 million redesign had been nominated for federal stimulus money for "shovel-ready" projects by U.S. Rep. David Wu, and U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, but failed to make the cut last month.

A female pedestrian was injured at the corner last month when a garbage truck struck her as she was crossing the street. Portland Police Officer Sze Lai, who investigated the accident, said the woman was wearing black clothing and that the driver of the garbage truck did not see her. He did not think the accident was related to the layout of the intersection.

The portions of the project that have been completed include a segment between Southwest 30th Avenue and Bertha Boulevard, between Bertha Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard (Hillsdale Town Center), and between Barbur Boulevard going south and PCC Sylvania (West Portland Park).

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