

School boundary committee revises recommendations after Wilson forum

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The first set of recommendations for West Side schools was presented to Portland Public Schools Superintendent Carole Smith in mid-February.

The District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee, which formed almost two years ago to address overcrowding and under enrollment issues, made a revised set of recommendations after a mid-January forum held at Wilson High School.

The original recommendation redrew Rieke Elementary School boundaries to send some Rieke students to Bridlemile School, some Bridlemile and Rieke students to Hayhurst School, and some Ainsworth Elementary students to Bridlemile and Rieke.

But the boundary committee decisions came with a divisive tone after comments made by Hillsdale Professional and Business Association president Mike Roach which set off a chain of reactions from the Hayhurst community.

Representing Rieke Elementary school that night, Roach spoke out against the proposed boundary changes saying it would create a traffic nightmare in the Hillsdale town center caused by parents taking their children to their new school assignments.

News stations ran Roach's comparison of the traffic situation to the "carnageddon" seen in Los Angeles.

Roach did not clarify that he was not speaking for the business group. His comments didn't sit well with Hayhurst parents since they were in favor of the proposal. Angry Hayhurst parents wrote Roach and many threatened to boycott Hillsdale businesses. Roach apologized to the Hayhurst community for the misunderstanding.

Dr. Kirsten Carr, a parent who plays

an active role on the Hayhurst strategic planning committee, commented that the proposal did not sit well with the Rieke neighbors.

"Adopting Roach's proposal," Carr said, "would make Hayhurst under-enrolled since the Hayhurst Odyssey program will either move to Jackson Middle school or a renovated Smith Elementary School."

The boundary committee took Roach's words to heart and revised its recommendations, now called 2B. It now includes no boundary changes for Rieke and only a small boundary change from Maplewood to Hayhurst retained from the previous scenario. It shifts around Ainsworth so Rieke isn't impacted.

"These results alleviate overcrowding at Hayhurst without creating enrollment imbalance," Carr told *The Post*.

"They do not fully understand our specific predicament and obviously want to protect a perceived integrity of their own school community," Carr commented referring to Rieke School. "We felt the need to voice our displeasure."

The Post was not able to reach Roach for comment for this story. However, Roach did send an email to Hillsdale Business Association members and apologies to Hayhurst for misrepresenting the association.

"I suggested other Hillsdale business owners would oppose a change in the boundaries," Roach's email continued, "about which Rieke parents were extremely upset and opposed to."

Roach's email stated that the business association has no official position on proposed changes and is unlikely to have one in the future.

"Each business owner is (of course) free to express their opinion, if they dare!" Roach wrote.

Hayhurst has long been intertwined with Rieke. Over the years the two

schools have seen growth and contraction as generations of families moved into the neighborhood as young families and out of the neighborhood as retirees.

Although Hayhurst is large enough for almost 600 students, due to the inclusion of the Odyssey program, the building is out of room to accommodate growth.

"In the 2017 school year," Dr. Carr said, "we are expected to be even larger through natural growth of the neighborhood. But, we are out of room and will need space for two additional classrooms."

Brian Unflat, a Rieke, Gray, and Wilson parent, has been meeting with Carr and others to come up with an alternative scenario.

"One possible solution," Unflat wrote, "is that the Rieke leadership support families in Rieke, Bridlemile, and Maplewood neighborhoods to opt into Hayhurst to help keep them at right-sized enrollment."

Carr said that a recent survey shows 50 percent of the parents are in favor of looking into these boundary options.

This month, Superintendent Smith makes final recommendations to the school board who will then deliberate and vote. In the spring, the boundary committee will reconvene to assist the Portland school district in setting boundaries and feeder patterns for the reconfigured K-8 schools.

The school board will consider and vote on those recommendations as well. The decision is expected before the end of the school year giving



Dr. Kirsten Carr, parent of a first grader at Hayhurst Elementary School, continues to testify on issues concerning West Side school boundary issues. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

families certainty about their school assignments a year in advance.

Planning, staffing, and building improvements will then take place to prepare for K-8 reconfiguration by the 2017 school year. There will be opportunities for additional public comment.

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