

CHOOSING TO CLOSE SCHOOLS FOR THE POOR

The 4J School Board gave little indication last week, Feb. 13, that they would alter the recommendation of Superintendent George Russell to force the poor, largely Latino children out of a neighborhood elementary school in South Eugene to give the building to whiter and wealthier alternative school children.

Russell recommended last week to close Harris, a neighborhood elementary, and give its building to the Eastside and Charlemagne alternative schools. Harris is 67 percent free and reduced lunch while Eastside is 5 percent and the Charlemagne French Immersion school is 10 percent. Harris is 25 percent Latino while Eastside and Charlemagne are both 1 percent Latino.

Kristen Larson, a parent of three Harris children, told the board that the decision to close Harris for the alternative schools was "basic discrimination against the lower income families." Larsen said, "If you support these recommendations, shame on you."

But not a single board member gave clear indication that they did not support the recommendation.

School Board Member Charles Martinez did question how it was decided that the alternative schools would have an "immunization from closure" during the district's "Schools of the Future" process, intended to consolidate schools due to declining enrollment and supposedly to reduce inequities. "I don't think that's consistent with board direction."

Russell admitted that school board minutes clearly show that closing an alternative school should be "open for consideration."

So why didn't Russell recommend closing alternative schools to boost enrollment at neighborhood schools?

Russell said if the board directed him to close the alternative schools, "I'm happy to do that." But he said it was his impression that the board had eliminated that option. "I felt that was not really on the table in light of the decisions that had been made previously."

Russell said that he was also recommending that unlike every other school, Charlemagne French Immersion students would be immune from his recommendation to limit transfers to Roosevelt Middle School and South Eugene High School. The French immersion students would be given automatic places at the two popular schools even if they did not reside in the appropriate school boundary. Charlemagne students would take French immersion slots at the school, bumping out other students who may want to attend the schools for the other popular programs they offer.

An Eastside parent testified to the board reading a statement from her school's parent group thanking the superintendent for giving the Harris building to them. "Our community appreciates and supports George Russell's recommendation."

James Riggs, a single father of three children at Harris, told the board his son Wyatt has attention deficit disorder and depends on the helpful relationships he's established with staff at Harris. "If he gets moved to a new school, he will be lost. There will be no future for him." — Alan Pittman



Wyatt Burns

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

OLCV RATES COUNCILORS, COMMISSIONERS

An analysis of selected environmental votes released this week by the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV) points to a distinctly polarized Eugene City Council. However, Mayor Kitty Piercy's role as a tie-breaker swung the council to an overall 61 percent approval rating for the past two years, about the same as 2004-2005, and much improved over 2002-2003 when Jim Torrey was mayor.

Councilors Poling, Solomon and Clark all got zero marks on the OLCV's environmental scorecard and Pryor got a 27 percent rating. Earning 100 percent ratings were Bettman, Taylor, Kelly (while in office), Zelenka (while in office) and Ortiz. Piercy got an 89 percent rating on the issues she voted on.

"We're lucky to have a mayor who understands the importance of leaving a great environmental legacy for our children," said Jan Wilson of the OLCV.

At the County Commission, the numbers have improved, due in large part to the replacement of zero-rated Anna Morrison with 100 percent-rated Bill Fleenor. Commissioner Bobby Green earned a 47 percent rating, Faye Stewart 53 percent, Bill Dwyer 93 percent and Pete Sorenson 100 percent.

To come up with the ratings, the OLCV Lane County chapter looked at key votes on

disputed issues with environmental impacts. At the city level, the issues dealt with stormwater pre-treatment, wetlands protection, creating and funding the Sustainability Commission, supporting the Endangered Species Act, limiting sprawl, supporting regional planning, increasing park funding, protecting farmland, protecting the Amazon Headwaters and approving pedestrian-oriented development.

At the county level, multiple votes each concerned protecting farmland, limiting sprawl and improving air quality. Other issues included pesticide exposure and protecting Oregon's coastline from development.

Visit www.olcv.org/lane for more detailed information.

SLUMLORD CODE TO EXPAND

During the first two years of the city's rental housing code program, tenants called the city 815 times. But 410 of those calls were related to bad rental issues not covered by the code.

So now city staff are recommending that the City Council add mold, security and smoke detector problems to the code. The current code addresses only structural integrity, plumbing, heating and weatherproofing.

The city has found 106 legitimate complaints of violations of the housing code in the past two years. On five occasions, the city fined landlords for lack of response to orders to fix problems.

The city funds enforcement by collecting an annual \$10 fee for each rental unit from the 27,000 rentals in the city. Last year the program had a \$76,000 budget surplus, but the city expects higher enforcement costs from extending the program to the other problem areas. — Alan Pittman

FROM SCHOOL TO STRIP MALL

The former Santa Clara Elementary School site may be converted into about 85,000 sq. ft. of shops, banks and restaurants and 250 parking spaces under a proposal before the Eugene City Council.

Santa Clara is the first of several sites School District 4J has proposed closing and rezoning to maximize a selling price. Other sites include Fox Hollow Elementary, Coburg Elementary, Willard Elementary and Civic Stadium.

The proposal by Oregon West Management includes a 15,000 sq. ft. pharmacy, a bank, coffee shop and small plaza and small area for an open air market. The proposal near Hunsaker and River Road also includes 43 adjacent residential units.

Neighborhood leaders expressed concern over the prospect of a large commercial project in testimony before the Eugene Planning Commission last October. Kate Perle said River Road should not be turned into another West 11th Avenue and that the project failed to actually mix sufficient residential units in with the commercial development.

Catherine Lesiak wrote to the commission that it should not allow "huge strip mall" congestion at the important site of the school that served as the center of the neighborhood. "The proposed development is business as usual corporate commercial," she wrote.

The Planning Commission voted 4-2 on Nov. 19 to approve the proposal. The City Council is scheduled March 10 to make the final decision on the zoning and plan amendments needed for the development. — Alan Pittman