

news Briefs

4J MULLS CUTS, EQUITY, CITY TAX

The Eugene 4J School District at a Jan. 12 board meeting increased its estimate of budget cuts, backed away from closing a diverse neighborhood school and supported a city effort to help fund local schools.

After hearing new numbers from Governor-elect John Kitzhaber, 4J Superintendent George Russell revised his \$22 million estimate of cuts to \$26 million. “The \$26 million is a more realistic target,” Russell said.

At the meeting a majority of school board members and district staff appeared to oppose closing Adams elementary, one of the brownest and poorest schools in the district, to give the building to the Charlemagne French immersion elementary, one of the whitest and richest schools in the district.

“I wouldn’t support closing Adams,” said board member Anne Marie Levis, a French immersion parent.

“I still do recommend moving the Charlemagne school to the Parker site,” Russell said.

But a board majority opposed officially taking the option of closing Adams off the table, forcing Adams parents to go to more late night meetings to defend their school.

Fox Hollow parents apparently won’t

have to plea for their school. The School Board has not applied the same closure tests and criteria to Fox Hollow as it has applied to neighborhood schools. Some critics have long charged that targeting poorer and browner neighborhood schools for budget cut closures while exempting richer and whiter alternative schools is discrimination.

The board now appears to be targeting the Parker neighborhood school to make room for the French alternative school. Two board members suggested a less disruptive and costly option of not closing a neighborhood school for the French school pending a proposed reevaluation of 4J alternative schools next year.

But other board members did not voice support for officially adding that option. “I guess that we are not going to do that,” Board Chairman Craig Smith said.

Moving Fox Hollow to Parker may apparently save almost no money, as it would require a new large parking lot and drop-off area because almost all the French school parents drive their kids to school, according to 4J staff.

But school administrators said they support closing neighborhood schools even if no money is saved, arguing that coping with staffing cuts is easier on kids and administrators in a larger school. Even if closing smaller schools saves no money, “it would still be a wise idea,” said Peter Tromba, head of a 4J administrators group.

District staff argued for a May school construction bond measure of about \$130 million. They argued the timing would: leverage \$15 million in federal construction funding; allow the district to claim it wasn’t raising taxes because of an expiring previous school construction levy; and prevent layoffs of 4J construction staff.

But if the two measures divided and confused voters, a May bond vote to build new schools could cause the district to lose \$10 million dollars or more in operating funding from a proposed city tax on the May

ballot to prevent mass teacher layoffs, packed classrooms and four-day school weeks.

If both measures are on the ballot, “what would that mean for the chances for either or both passing?” Russell wondered.

Timing the school construction measure with the district’s budget cuts could also complicate the bond measure’s passage. “Why are we asking for money to build schools when we are closing schools?” asked Pamela Gutierrez, a Crest Elementary parent.

Two board members and Russell spoke favorably of the city tax effort for schools.

Russell said he was “encouraged” that the Eugene City Council voted unanimously last week to study a city income tax to help fund the school district. “I think they need to be thinking about something that would be able to get \$10 million for this district,” Russell said.

“I think that it’s important that we’re open to this conversation they’re having at the city,” board member Jennifer Geller said.

Board chairman Smith said of the city tax effort for schools, “I’m hopeful that something will come of it.” — *Alan Pittman*

CHROMIUM-6 GETS TESTED LOCALLY

Chromium-6, aka hexavalent chromium — it’s the nasty cancer-causing stuff that led to a \$333 million lawsuit against Pacific Gas and Electric in California for contaminating a town’s drinking water and to the award-winning film *Erin Brockovich*.

After the advocacy organization Environmental Working Group’s December report showing that hexavalent chromium is in the water of 31 of 35 U.S. cities, including Bend, the carcinogen became an issue again.

On Jan. 15 the Environmental Protection Agency recommended that utilities nationwide test drinking water for hexavalent chromium.

Karl Morgenstern, EWEB’s drinking water source protection coordinator, says, “We test for total chromium, which includes chromium-6, and have not had any detections above lab reporting limits in raw water.”

He adds, “We have had a few detections in some tributaries, Camp and Cedar Creeks, but only 5 to 10 percent of the time.”

The utility says it has never detected chromium in its finished water or in the distribution system.

EWEB begins enhanced monitoring for the contaminant this week and will send samples to a lab in California capable of detecting minute levels of chromium.

Chromium-6 has not been a regulated contaminant, but the EPA says, that “the science behind chromium-6 is evolving,” and the agency is reviewing its health effects.

The EPA has previously found hexavalent chromium “likely to be carcinogenic to humans.” Previous studies have shown inhaling it causes lung cancer. In 2009, National Toxicology Program scientists reported that their two-year study on drinking water “clearly demonstrates” that the contaminant causes cancer. Rodents in the study developed malignant tumors in their small intestines and mouths from drinking water containing several different amounts of hexavalent chromium.

In Coos County, a controversial chromite mine under construction has caused fears that the contaminant could be released into the groundwater.

Although chromium occurs naturally in the earth, it can also get into water through chlorine, a common disinfectant in Oregon water systems, which can chemically transform the benign trivalent chromium into the carcinogenic chromium-6.

— *Camilla Mortensen*

ANGELA DAVIS AT WOMEN OF COLOR CONFAB

Angela Davis, Yellow Rage and Favianna Rodriguez are keynote speakers at the eighth annual Women of Color Conference from 8 am to 6 pm Friday and Saturday, Jan. 21-22, in Gerlinger Lounge and the LLC Performance Hall at UO. The event is free and open to the public.

The theme of the conference, sponsored by the ASUO Women’s Center, is “Our New Year’s Resolution: Ending Oppression Through Expression!”



“We hope to provide a safe, welcoming space for women and allies who historically have been marginalized to express their voices, experiences, and/or artistic talents,” reads a statement from the organizers. “Participants will attend workshops ranging from meditation to soul collage making to mural art, giving them the tools necessary to continue their healing and expression as resolutions throughout the year. The emphasis of this conference is healing and educating around social and political inequalities of women and on establishing ways to continue advocacy and progress through workshops, guided facilitations, lectures and film screenings.”

Angela Davis is perhaps best known for her role in the Black Panthers in the 1960s, being on the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted List and founding Critical Resistance, an organization working to abolish the prison-industrial complex.

Today she is a political educator who incorporates feminism, African-American studies, critical theory, Marxism, prisoner rights and social consciousness into her publications and lectures. She will speak at 7 pm Saturday, Jan. 22, in Columbia 150. Doors open at 6 pm and her talk will be free for conference participants. For others, admission is \$5 for students, \$7 general.

Davis will also speak at 7:30 pm Friday, Jan. 21, at Willamette University’s Smith Auditorium in Salem. See <http://wkly.ws/10r> for a complete two-week list of WU events surrounding MLK Day.

Yellow rage is a spoken poetry duo “pulling powerful words from their political ideologies, person life philosophies and unique experiences as Asian-American women.”

Favianna Rodriguez is an artist-entrepreneur who has helped foster a resurgence in political arts both locally and internationally. Named by *UTNE Reader* as a “leading visionary artist and change maker,” Rodriguez is known for her cultural media projects dealing with social issues such as war, immigration and globalization as well as for her leadership in establishing innovative institutions.

For more information, visit <http://pages.uoregon.edu/women> or email Andrea Valderrama at diversitywc@gmail.com