

HB board comes to terms on Pier Avenue purchase

 "If an agreement is not reached by the board at tonight's meeting, then the whole deal (sale of Pier Avenue School to the city) is off," Hermosa school superintendent Andrew Joyce told the school board at the beginning of last Tuesday's meeting.

Two and a half hours later, after many frequently emotional exchanges between the board and members of the audience who were opposed to the sale of the school, the board tentatively settled upon conditions for the sale. The board will present its terms to the city council at a joint meeting this Wednesday, January 11.

The board agreed to ask the council to forego use of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds to purchase the school if HUD disallows use of the facilities for recreational purposes by the school district. In exchange the board expressed willingness, if necessary to reduce the sale price of the school by \$140,000, which is equal to half of the anticipated HUD grant.

The HUD grant will require the Pier Avenue facilities be used fifty percent of the time by low and middle income families. Throughout negotiations between the city and the school district, the board has been concerned that the fifty percent provision might preclude local school children from using the facility for recreational purposes.

The board also agreed to ask the council to extend the waiver of the statute of limitations on the property

for one year to keep open the school district's right to sue the city for rezoning the property from commercial to open space in the event the city doesn't buy the school.

The appearance at the board meeting of Hermosa councilman George Barks as a member of the audience, in violation of an unwritten law which forbids elected members of one body from interfering in the activities of another, further charged what began as a tense and highly emotional meeting.

"The citizens are aware the city can't manage property effectively. The Biltmore site is a classic example of this," Barks said.

"I estimate Pier Avenue will cost the city between \$100,000 and \$200,000 to maintain per year—and this at a time when the city can't even provide adequate police and fire services," he continued.

"Mr. Barks, I do not feel this is the place to discuss city finances," board member John Rodgers interrupted. "That's to be done at council meetings."

"The school board is constantly giving up," Barks retorted. "Pier Avenue School is one of the finest junior highs in the South Bay. The board should seriously consider keeping it."

Several other residents joined Barks in protesting the proposed sale, including James Barks, (the councilman's brother), Jim Holbrook and Hollie Murray. Barks later reported that the residents are considering circulating a petition to try to qualify the issue for a public referendum.