Easy Reader

Documents show gymnasium ballot lapse

Gym project moving forward
by Robb Fulcher
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A mistake that omitted a proposed gymnasium from a 2002 citywide ballot measure can be traced to a resolution approved by the Hermosa Beach City School Board, according to documents on file at the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office.

Two School Board members said the mistake was not caused by the board, however.

The mistake has been seized on by residents who are suing to halt construction of the gym at Hermosa Valley School. The residents claim that the gym cannot legally be built because it was not among the construction projects listed on the Measure J ballot in 2002, when Hermosa voters approved $13.6 million in school bonds.

In the resolution, adopted in July 2002, the school board directed the Registrar's Office to include only a brief summary of the construction projects – with no mention of the gym – on the November 2002 ballot.

The School Board's resolution, received by county election officials July 25, 2002, did include an itemized list of construction projects – including the gym – that the board labeled "Exhibit B." However, the resolution did not direct the Registrar to include the "Exhibit B" list on the ballot. The resolution did direct the Registrar to include "Exhibit A," which was the shorter summary without the gym.

The resolution, signed by the board's then-President Cathy McCurdy and then-Superintendent Robert "Duffy" Clark, is on file at the Registrar's Office in Norwalk.

School board members contend that despite questions over the ballot, voters knowingly approved a gym. They point out that the gym was mentioned in the ballot's arguments in favor of the bond measure – signed by McCurdy and others – and the gym was mentioned in ballot arguments against the bond measure. Board members also point out that the gym project was frequently discussed at school board meetings, in the pages of local newspapers and in the election campaign for Measure J.

Mix-up

Current School Board President Lance Widman has blamed the mistake on a mix-up between the school district's former bond attorney and the Registrar's Office. This week Widman said his view of the mix-up came from a "comment" made to the School Board.

"Some time ago that comment was made, and frankly I can't recollect who said it," Widman said.

But Widman and McCurdy said they believe the bond attorney, the firm of Stradling, Yocca, Carlson and Rauth, was responsible for seeing that the resolution was proper before it was passed along to the Registrar.

"We hire people to do that work, we hire consultants," Widman said. "The [school] district did what it was supposed to do."

Neither Widman nor McCurdy had reviewed the resolution after questions were raised about the wording of the ballot measure. McCurdy said the resolution was among documents that the School Board has requested from the Registrar, to help answer questions about the ballot.

An attorney for Stradling, Yocca who worked on Measure J was not available early this week.

Full steam ahead

Despite the lawsuit by the roughly 30-member Committee for Responsible School Expansion, Widman said the school board plans to seek a construction contractor and stay on course with the gym project.

The lawsuit seeks to block the project and force the school board to consider changes in the gym's size and

location, but the lawsuit does not ask for a temporary halt to the project while those issues are thrashed out in court, Widman said.
"That's right from the lawsuit itself. There's nothing in there that says we can't pass go," Widman said. "... We are proceeding with what we've got to do."

Gym 'not important'
A pre-election survey by a school district consultant found that the gym was "not viewed as important" by residents.
The consultant, Evans/McDonough Incorporated, suggested that the district split Measure J in two, asking voters to approve new classrooms and the gym separately. The consultant also advised that "possible opposition to a gymnasium could cause problems with the passage of a bond measure," according to official minutes from a June 26, 2002, meeting of the school board.

Enough money?
Meanwhile, a construction consultant has estimated that the school district has fallen about $1.3 million short in revenues needed to build the $6.3 million gym building, said Sam Abrams, chairman of a committee that oversees how the bond money is spent.
That estimate, released in late March, followed an estimate three months earlier by the same consultant that the gym project was falling about $1 million short.
The school district started out with $15.6 million in local and state bonds for new school buildings and for an overhaul of plumbing, electricity, safety features, handicapped access, heating, air conditioning and technology-lab features at the 3-8 Valley School and the K-2 Hermosa View School. The upgrades cost nearly $10 million, leaving the district with $5.8 remaining for the new buildings at Valley School.
The gym building, as planned, would be placed near the southwest corner of the campus on Valley Drive. The 34-foot-tall, 26,000 square-foot building also would include a new science lab, library and classrooms. ER

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