

New school gym: traffic, parking, noise

by Robb Fulcher

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Residents once again urged the city school board to take steps to ease traffic congestion, parking problems and possible excessive noise from a gymnasium planned for Hermosa Valley School. The residents' written comments were submitted as the school board seeks state approval for the gym project.

Some residents made one more try to talk the district out of building the gym, which was approved by Hermosa voters in a 2002 bond issue that also called for construction of new classrooms and a science lab at Valley School.

The school board is scheduled to discuss the comments at its March 9 meeting. The comments could prompt the board to make changes in an environmental impact report that outlines steps the board will take to protect the gym's neighbors. State officials must sign off on the report before construction can begin.

The current draft of the report states that noise from the gym would have a "less than significant" impact on neighbors, and predicts that traffic congestion would not significantly worsen.

The report does predict that parking problems in the neighborhood will be significantly worsened, and states that the school district can offer no relief from those problems. However, board member Cathy McCurdy said district officials continue to explore the possible use of parking spaces at the Vons shopping center near the school, although the report makes no mention of those talks.

Under state law, community groups and sports leagues must be allowed to use the gym after classes and on weekends, "which could increase the demand for parking" in the surrounding neighborhood, according to the report.

Resident Jerry Compton, an architect whose home stands near the school, urged the school board to consider building the gym next to Valley Drive instead of on the Southwest corner of the campus.

Compton complained that the board's current plan would result in "catastrophic" parking congestion.

Suzy Compton, Jerry's wife, also complained of increased parking problems, and wrote that a noise study conducted by the school district was "a joke."

School neighbors Earl and Kristine Keegan wrote that "the noise and activity level in the surrounding residential neighborhood will be substantial" once the gym is in use...Currently there is no nighttime use of the school facility."

The Keegans urged that the gym doors remain closed whenever it is being used, to muffle excessive noise, and asked how the district plans to protect adjoining classrooms from gym noises such as bouncing basketballs and referees' whistles. The Keegans also urged the school board to study ways to ease traffic on an "overburdened" Valley Drive when after-school games are played from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Keegans wrote that the school board should consider: Building a smaller gym for student use only; building a second parking deck atop a faculty parking lot at the south edge of the school; providing extra parking near the gym; relocating the gym to the faculty parking lot, with parking on a level below; and changing the student configurations on the 3-8 Valley School and the K-2 Hermosa View School so that K-5 students attend Valley and 6-8 students go to View.

The Keegans urged the board to reconsider the idea of improving the nearby Hermosa Beach Community Center gymnasium and using it for "gym class," and buying land occupied by school neighbors Adelphia Communications and the Marineland mobile home park.

The Keegans complained that the environmental impact report does not analyze after-school security, possible loss of school open space, and impacts from additional auto trips to drop people off and pick them up at the gym. Local resident Chris Miller also reiterated her view that the school board should scrap its plans for a new gym and instead use the one at the Community Center.

Miller gave school district officials a copy of a letter inviting Gov. Schwarzenegger to visit the site. The letter to the governor was signed by 30 people, Miller wrote.

Beth Cross, a supporter of the 2002 bond issue, also urged the school board to consider scrapping the gym. She pointed out that officials already have reduced the number of new classrooms to be built with the bonds, and wrote that eliminating the gym might be “a prudent financial consideration.”

Marcei Brubaker expressed concern about excessive noise and greater parking problems, and suggested that the gym should be scrapped in favor of building more classrooms.

“Isn’t education a priority?” Brubaker wrote. “Isn’t that why we have schools?”

Jackie Flaherty also opposed building the gym, and wrote that such a facility is not necessary for students younger than high school age.

Gretchen Corbell complained that the school district considers additional parking problems from the gym “unavoidable.” She urged the board to reconsider expanding the school parking lot along Valley Drive, consider parking cars on asphalt near the gym during “large events,” and try to use the Vons shopping center for extra parking.

Jim Hausle, a member of a legally required oversight committee that watches over expenditure of the school bond money, also supported some of the parking mitigation measures that the school board had rejected.

Fred Huebscher urged the school board to reconsider expanding its northern parking lot along Valley Drive, as well as restricting the number of gym users, and complained that noise and parking issues were not adequately addressed in the environmental impact report.

Lawrence O. Fordiani wrote that he lives within 100 yards of the school, and his chief concern is possible worsening of parking problems in the area. He also urged the board to do whatever it can to prevent excessive noise from use of the gym after school hours.

“Even at my distance from the school, I can hear the school bells and the outdoor activities,” he wrote. “During school hours this is acceptable.” ER

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