

SAN LEANDRO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
SAN LEANDRO, CALIFORNIA
www.sanleandro.k12.ca.us

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION – MINUTES

November 29, 2005

The Board of Education of the San Leandro Unified School District met in special session on November 29, 2005, in the San Leandro Unified School District Office Conference Room 1, 14735 Juniper Street, San Leandro, California.

The meeting was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag at 5:35 p.m. by President Pauline Cutter.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Stephen Cassidy (arrived at 5:40)
Mrs. Lisa Hague
Mr. Louis Heystek
Ms. Linda Perry
Mr. Ray Davis, Clerk
Mr. T.W. “Rick” Richards, Vice President
Mrs. Pauline Cutter, President

DISTRICT STAFF PRESENT

Christine Lim, Superintendent
Leon Glaster, Assistant Superintendent
Cindy Cathey, Assistant Superintendent

Superintendent Lim introduced the new Vice Principal at San Leandro High School, Daniel Chaja, before the work session began.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

Superintendent Lim reviewed the community engagement process, an analysis of other successful parcels in Alameda County, and various tax models. Brad Senden from the Center of Community Opinion presented the results of the community survey, and legal counsel presented the legal parameters of a parcel tax. An informal question-and-answer discussion followed the presentations.

Superintendent Lim said that the community engagement process included an accumulation of five community forums, the release of *Engaging the San Leandro Community and its Schools* by Fern Tiger Associates, two community meetings, a reception for parent leaders, two District leadership and staff meetings, an

informal meeting with the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, and all District's unions. This resulted in a list of the top four priorities that included: attracting and retaining highly qualified staff; maintaining safe and clean schools, and positive learning environments; enhancing library, media, and technology services; and District, and school academic and enrichment programs. She noted that, in addition, Garfield, McKinley Roosevelt, Washington, and Wilson elementary schools, John Muir Middle School; and Lincoln Continuation High School had all conducted a community process at their school sites. Lists of their budget priorities, were also included in the information packet, based on the question, "If the school district had additional financial resources, what would you spend the extra funds on?"

Staff conducted an analysis of the most recent successful parcel tax measures of five districts in Alameda County: Berkeley, Albany, Piedmont, Livermore, and Alameda, including the approval rate, duration, exemption(s), annual inflation adjustment, tax model and rates, oversight and accountability provisions, and purpose, noting that a 66 2/3 percent or rounded 67 percent approval rate was needed to pass a parcel.

Brad Senden from The Center for Community Opinion walked through the results of the community survey, stating that 404 interviews with registered voters in the school district were completed between November 19 and November 27, 2005. Results showed that support for both a parcel tax proposal and a bond had increased since they had surveyed voter opinion in the spring of 2004. Mr. Senden explained tables comparing parcel tax and bond benchmark questions from both the 2004 and 2005 surveys.

Based on the information presented, overall conclusions and recommendations from The Center for Community Opinion included:

- Only a parcel tax with a very low cost to the average homeowner is feasible at this time, and the cost to the average homeowners should not exceed \$27.
- Voters dislike all of the possible tax structures presented to them in this survey, and they would not recommend trying anything other than a very traditional parcel tax at this time, adding that because the rate will need to be kept very low, it may not be worth the effort to win voter approval of such a parcel tax.
- Additional voter education will be needed before a parcel tax based on square footage can be attempted. To provide voters with the kind of information they need to overcome a less than positive reaction to either of the square-foot-based options tested in this survey, the District must be assured that the local business community will accept such a proposal. If, while attempting to present this option to the local voters, it is attacked by the business community, the chances of winning voter approval drops from slim to none.
- A bond under the provisions of Proposition 39 is feasible next year if the cost is set at or below \$30 per \$100,000 assessed value.

Assistant Superintendent Leon Glaster presented data regarding three tax models: flat parcel tax; square foot by lot size; and square foot by building as prepared by Kelling, Northcross & Nobriga, adding that the estimates included senior exemptions, and as additional information and feedback was received from various groups, the data would be revised.

Legal parameters of a parcel tax were presented by the District's legal counsel, Adam Ferber. He shared timelines for an April 11 or June 6 parcel-tax measure.

Mr. Ferber explained that the only explicit law on the subject was Government Code Section 50079, which provides and requires that qualified special taxes such as parcel taxes must be "uniformly applied." He also explained that his firm believes that uniformity is complied through one of two models: a per parcel "flat tax" (i.e. \$50 per parcel), or uniform square foot, and he's recommending that, to limit the legal risk, the District should consider a per-parcel model or uniform-rate model, and not to differentiate among different types of property, i.e., industrial, commercial, etc.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

- Heidi Finberg, Executive Director, of the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, said that she was very proud of their long-standing partnership with City and school district, and that they recognized the need for additional funding for the schools. While they realize that the quality of the workforce and community is directly linked to the quality of education, the Chamber felt that the cost and the short amount of time to education the community, made the April special election problematic, and that more work was needed to research and formulate an equitable, easy to understand format that would be right for everyone, residents, rental housing owners, and the business community, noting that with the support of the Chamber, the City was expected to move ahead with a business license tax increase on the June ballot. She appreciated staff coming to the Chamber with data and asking for their input, but felt they needed a lot more time to engage the membership and business community. "We know that the district has funding problems and they want to be part of the solution", stating that they would be happy to meet with the District, move forward with the outreach, and looked forward to having a thriving school district in the future.
- Al Frates, said that as a senior citizen, he very much supported a parcel tax because he wants the schools to improve and the value of their homes to increase; however, he felt that April was too soon and urged them to look towards a June or later date.
- Billy Campbell, Head Custodian at Madison Elementary School, spoke in support of a parcel tax measure, stating that it is time for the citizens of San Leandro to support the schools and return the schools to something that the community can be proud of.

- Juan M. Martinez, parent in the school district, also spoke in favor of a parcel tax, stating that he would do everything he could to help educate the community on the value of education, the wonderful things that the District has done, and what needs to continue in order to increase student achievement and improve this wonderful community that we live in.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Board members all agreed that there was definitely a need for a parcel tax but continued the discussion regarding their concern about timing and whether to go for a special election in April or a June primary election.

Mr. Heystek supported moving ahead with a parcel tax in April, stressing that this was something that could not be put off any longer, and that we needed to continue to engage the community and make an all out effort to succeed.

Regarding the cost difference between the two elections raised by President Cutter, Superintendent Lim said that with a special election, the District would be responsible for the entire cost, while costs would be shared with the City with a June election.

Mr. Richards was unsure of what model to use, but was leaning towards June, giving the District more time to complete the work that was needed to insure a successful election.

Mr. Davis and Mrs. Hague both agreed with Mr. Heystek that the District needs to “shoot for success” and not look at it as a “trial balloon,” concurring that June may be the best time for success and less expensive for the District. This would give the District time to have the Chamber’s support, as well as the apartment owners’ association, whose input the District still had not heard, as well as to craft the language would be acceptable to all parties.

Ms. Perry was happy that the survey showed the continued support for the bond, and felt that we should pursue a bond in November. She also felt that a parcel tax, on the other hand, could be tricky, adding that it would be an uphill battle, but she felt that if they didn’t take a risk, the District may never get out of the situation they are in.

Responding to Mr. Cassidy, it was Mr. Senden’s opinion that a special election in April, for those District’s seeking to have a first-time parcel tax enacted, enables the District to engage the community on the need for funding and the uses for that funding, as it would most likely compete with nothing else on the ballot. Whereas a June ballot, when it’s a primary, can be challenging. He also felt that more important than the timing of the election, was to be prepared and ready.

Mr. Cassidy said that it was the responsibility of the trustees to identify the needs of the students and then to develop solutions for addressing those needs, adding that this District not only has pressing facilities needs but also pressing operating revenue needs. "We need to expand our school sites, modernize our existing ones, and we need to bring in greater operating revenue," so that we no longer will be at the bottom of Alameda County in revenue per student. Mr. Cassidy felt that April would give the District the best chance for success, adding that "if we begin working tremendously hard today, we can get it done by April."

Mrs. Cutter said it would be prudent to determine the size of the tax levy and which programs the money would support if the measure passed. She commended Mr. Cassidy for sharing his list of enhanced revenue per student in local district areas, making it clear that it was San Leandro's responsibility, and that we could not count on the state.

Responding to Mrs. Cutter, Superintendent Lim explained that if we were looking at an April special election, a Resolution would need to be passed by January 6, 2006, noting that there were two more Board meetings before that and a special meeting could be scheduled after the winter break to complete everything necessary to move ahead. Staff indicated that they had already compiled a "dream cost" list for \$4.9 million; however, based on the information on the parcel tax models, it needed to be refined, more focused, and narrowed down.

Mr. Cassidy was adamant that he wanted to look towards an April special election, stressing that there was no higher priority than for the school district to get out of the basement position that they are in through the county. He urged the superintendent and staff to work with the Chamber, apartment owners, and every stakeholder to try to expedite the process, and craft a proposal that would satisfy their needs by the next Board meeting.

It was the consensus of the Board to move ahead with a parcel tax measure, have staff prepare a recommendation to include a cost analysis of priorities identified through the community survey and other community engagement processes, as well as Mr. Heystek's suggestion to include percentages of the total amount that funding would be spent on by the December 13, 2005, Board meeting, and also to schedule a special meeting after that.

Prior to adjourning the meeting, Mr. Cassidy announced that for those interested in participating in this effort, a community meeting was scheduled for Sunday, December 4, at 7:00 p.m., at Jefferson Elementary School.

Mr. Davis would like to see the slogan "Committed to Academic Excellence for All Children" appear on all District and site correspondence to reinforce the District's commitment to closing the achievement gap. The Board agreed to add it as a discussion item as to whether it was the District's "slogan" or vision statement, and proceed from there.

President Cutter announced a "Pirate tailgating celebration" to support San Leandro High's football team on the way to the NCS championships, on Saturday, around 5:30 p.m. at the Coliseum. Tickets are available at the San Leandro High School student bank. She also reported that she has invited all of the San Leandro High School fall sport coaches and team members to the December 13 Board meeting to be recognized for all of their hard work.

Ms. Perry said that she would be attending the CSBA delegate assembly in San Diego from November 30 to December 1.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Mr. Richards and seconded by Mr. Davis, the Board adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m. by a 7-0 vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond E. Davis III, Clerk