



DATE: February 23, 2021

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: Community Services

TITLE: **Mountain View Whisman School District Proposed Fencing**

RECOMMENDATION

1. Provide Mountain View Whisman School District Board Members and staff feedback on the District's proposed perimeter fencing and communicate the City's interests in continuing collaborative efforts to provide community access to open space and meaningful opportunities for input through the Monta Loma Working Group.
2. Authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Mountain View Whisman School District Board of Trustees to transmit Council's feedback and priorities related to the proposed fencing project and process for the Monta Loma Working Group (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

BACKGROUND

History of City/District Collaboration

The City of Mountain View and the Mountain View Whisman School District (District) have a history of collaboration, innovation, and community problem-solving to benefit both the schools and the broader community. Examples include shared use of two gymnasiums at the middle schools, shared use of open space at school sites, and installation of an eight-million-gallon reservoir under the athletic fields at Graham Middle School as part of a project that also made significant improvement to the school's track and field.

Recently, the City has allocated approximately \$5.4 million toward infrastructure projects that provide benefits to both the District and community. These include field improvements at Crittenden Middle School, Castro Street improvements adjacent to Graham Middle School to enhance students' safety in biking and walking to school, the Permanente Creek extension to Middlefield Road adjacent to Crittenden Middle School

to provide additional safe routes for students walking and biking to school, Graham synthetic turf replacement, and improvements to a number of school restroom facilities.

In addition to these capital projects, there are also a number of initiatives and programs that continue as long-standing collaborative efforts between the District and City to serve District students. Examples include after-school and enrichment programs, including Beyond the Bell, the BEAT, Music4Schools, and Art4Schools. The City and District have also worked together on Safe Routes to Schools education activities.

Joint-Use Agreement

Since 1959, the District and the City have partnered through joint-use agreements to share the use of District fields for the purposes of providing public access to open space during nonschool hours. These agreements have been amended and updated over the years, and supplemental agreements also support the overarching cooperative shared use framework. The City currently maintains 62.5 acres of open space located on District property. This equates to 37 percent of the City's total open space, not including North Bayshore open space acreage. In accordance with the current joint-use agreement, the City maintains the fields, turf, and landscaped areas at all District school sites. The maintenance includes mowing, fertilizing, and irrigation, including repair of irrigation systems. The City's cost of maintaining this open space is approximately \$1.5 million per year. In return, the community has access to the open space, and the City provides and manages scheduled recreational activities during nonschool hours. As stated in the City's 2014 Parks and Open Space Plan, these school site open spaces count toward the City's goal of providing three acres of open space per 1,000 residents.

District Fencing Plans

As part of its Master Facility Plan, the District identified a need for perimeter fencing to enhance campus security and safety. The District fencing plans include closing gaps in existing fencing and installing gates with timed locks to provide public access during nonschool hours. A number of residents have raised questions and concerns related to the planned fencing project, especially in the Monta Loma neighborhood. During the fall of 2020, District staff held public outreach meetings for each school location. Additional meetings were held for Landels, Bubba, and Monta Loma Schools.

In response to the public input and concerns received by the City, District staff has provided updates at three City public meetings, including a presentation to the Parks and Recreation Commission on October, 14, 2020 and presentations to the City Council on October 27, 2020 and January 26, 2021.

During the January 26, 2021 City Council meeting, District staff provided details about the District's formation of the Monta Loma Working Group (Working Group) to further review proposals and discuss options for the proposed fencing at this school location. The Working Group composition is as follows: three District staff, two school parents, two community members, and a member of City staff. The Community Services Director will serve as the City staff representative. The first meeting of the Working Group is scheduled for February 25, 2021. These meetings will be facilitated by the District's Chief Business Officer.

Council Direction at January 26 Meeting

At its January 26 meeting, Council approved a motion related to the proposed fencing project:

To have City Manager McCarthy dialogue with Dr. Rudolph about a process to address the Monta Loma school/park situation as well as all other shared field/park locations with the District, and prior to the working group meeting for Monta Loma, have the City Council create an official statement/position on where the City stands on this issue at the Council meeting of February 23, 2021. There was a friendly amendment by Councilmember Lieber, and accepted by the second and the maker of the motion, to bring back a shared-use policy discussion on parks at a later time (possibly at a Council priorities meeting).

ANALYSIS

The joint-use agreement, which covers the Monta Loma school, includes a provision that requires the District to confer with the City and obtain the City's comments related to the District's proposed installation of facilities and/or equipment which may impact the use of the open space.

Thus, while the proposed new fencing is to be located on District property, the City is able to provide feedback and input and will do so in the context of its longstanding collaborative relationship with the District. Based on Council comments at the January 26, 2021 meeting, staff has outlined several high-level interests and desired outcomes for the District's fencing plans at Monta Loma School and for community use of the open space at District school sites in general. Staff has compiled these suggested interests and desired outcomes based on what appeared to be the consensus of Council comments at the January 26 Council meeting.

City Interests and Desired Outcomes Regarding Fencing at Monta Loma School

The City's interests regarding fencing at Monta Loma School relate both to the process by which a perimeter security solution is determined as well as the attributes of that ultimate solution. The City Council may wish to discuss and modify the interests and desired outcomes proposed by staff below. With Council's approval, these points will be provided to the District as feedback. City staff will also communicate Council's feedback during participation in Working Group meetings.

Regarding the process for arriving at a perimeter security solution at Monta Loma School, the City appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Monta Loma Working Group. Staff proposes the following interests regarding the operation of the Working Group:

- The dates and times of Working Group meetings should be communicated to the public and the meetings should be publicly accessible (virtually) to allow members of the community to watch the sessions.
- The District should prepare and distribute a summary following each Working Group meeting to summarize key discussion points and any actions of the meeting as well as the next steps in the process. The City can also assist with distribution of these summaries.
- Working Group members should be allowed time to review options/action steps with their stakeholders prior to final actions or decisions.
- The Superintendent should be invited to provide periodic written updates to the City Council with the possibility of a presentation prior to bringing recommendations of the Working Group to the District Board for final approval.

Regarding the City's desired outcomes for fencing at Monta Loma, staff proposes the following:

- Identify a workable solution that meets the needs of both the District and neighbors through open dialogue and discussion of creative ideas.
- Establish the boundaries of fencing in such a manner to maximize community access to open space.

Priorities for Community Use of Open Space at District School Sites

As previously mentioned, the District's Facility Master Plan includes changes to perimeter controls at all of its school sites. The most significant changes are at Monta Loma, Bubb, and Landels Schools. District staff has communicated that staff plans to install the proposed perimeter fencing at Castro/Mistral, Huff, Graham, Crittenden, and Stevenson/Thuerkauf Schools during the month of March. These campuses already have significant fencing in place, and the focus of work is to add gates with automatic locking/unlocking mechanisms. The District is currently waiting to move forward with Landels, Bubb, and Monta Loma Schools.

While City staff has received considerable comments of concern from residents in the Monta Loma neighborhood as well as some comments regarding Landels and Bubb Schools, there has been little to no concern expressed about plans at other schools. In addition, there are options for access to open space in the vicinity of other schools. (As noted below, staff plans an update to the City's Park and Open Space Master Plan that will help identify and develop strategies to address park and open space needs in the City.) Consequently, staff suggests the more detailed interests and desired outcomes for Monta Loma School, as outlined above, and the following overarching priorities for access to open space at District school sites in general:

- Continue collaboration with the District to preserve public access to open space located on District property during nonschool hours to benefit the community.
- Continue City maintenance of fields at District sites to provide recreational opportunities for the community.
- Continue efforts to enter into a new Master Agreement with the District for shared use of open space.
- Seek continued opportunities to maximize ongoing communication between the City and District staff and elected leaders.

Parks and Open Space Plan Update

In 2014, the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council approved the Parks and Open Space Master Plan (Plan). The Plan offers a long-range vision intended to guide decisions made to advance park and open space resources. The Plan also provides an evaluation of open space resources in the City and the City's neighborhoods and prioritizes recommendations for the acquisition, improvement, and preservation of parks and open spaces. The current Plan includes a suggestion for an update in five years and

that the next update should be more comprehensive. Funding will be included in the Fiscal Year 2021-22 Recommended Budget to conduct an update of this Plan.

The City Council approved a Recreation Plan in 2008, and staff believes that it is timely to update this Plan as well. Due to the areas of overlap between these plans, staff recommends that they be updated through a combined Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan for the community. This comprehensive update would reassess park space by planning area to identify areas in need of more open space and provide recommendations to meet those goals. There will also be a review of the existing fee schedule for programs and field/facility rentals as well as their associated guidelines. This project may be discussed during the Council goal-setting process.

Additional Updates Regarding District Open Space and Recreational Facilities

District Updates on Restrooms and Lighting Plans

In addition to the proposed fencing at school sites, the District has an interest to install new restrooms at certain school sites as well as additional lighting. The District will be sharing the details of these additional improvements with staff and Council in the coming weeks and months.

New Signage

As the fencing project has been discussed, members of the public have requested clear signage at District facilities regarding public access. At this time, both agencies are working to update the signage to more clearly state the hours of public access on school days. Signage is scheduled to state that school hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with Council's approval of a statement of interests and desired outcomes for the District's proposed perimeter fencing plans.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Modify the interests and desired outcomes proposed by staff.
2. Take no action.
3. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting and a copy of report to the Mountain View Whisman School District Superintendent.

Prepared by:

John R. Marchant
Community Services Director

Approved by:

Kimbra McCarthy
City Manager

JRM/AF/1/CAM
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Attachment: 1. City's Letter to Mountain View Whisman School District Board of Trustees