



Portsmouth Neighborhood Association
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Community Forum on Old Clarendon School Site and Northgate Park
New Columbia Community Education Center, 4625 N Trenton
October 6, 2009, 7-8:30 PM
Meeting convened at 7:05 by Greg Wilhelm, Chair

In attendance:

Portsmouth Neighborhood Association (PNA) board members; Suzanne Briggs, Multnomah County, Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL); Jack Gillentine, Officer, Portland Police, Neighborhood Response Team, Portsmouth; Susan Glenn, North Zone Services Manager, Portland Parks and Recreation; Martín González, Portland Public Schools (PPS) Board; Antonio Lopez, Principal, Portsmouth/Clarendon school; Tim Lyden, Portland Village School; Doretta Schrock, North Portland Neighborhood Services; Tony Magliano, Acting Director of Operations, PPS; and approximately 10 members of the general public. Approximately 25 people in attendance total.

Presentations

- Stephen Leiker, Chair, PNA Livability Committee, presented on the recent history and current status of the Clarendon site.
 - Currently vacant
 - PPS considers it a “swing space” – available for use during the construction or renovation of another school building
 - 4,769 square feet
 - Life cycle cost of \$6,172,397.
 - On a list of 150 important Portland architectural sites produced by Architectural Heritage Center
 - Cost per to heat it is approximately \$24,000 annually
- Jack Gillentine, Portland Police Neighborhood Response Team Officer for Portsmouth presented briefly:
 - Officers can drive into the play area and shine their flashlights in.
 - Mostly people are not hiding on the site.

- David Wynde (PPS Board, Chair, PPS Finance, Audit and Operations Committee) responded:
 - Clarified that the building was closed in 2006. Decision was made in 2003, and this [2009] is the third year the school has actually been closed.
 - PPS does not have any specific plans for the building.
 - Reviewed need for swing space: PPS anticipates need for swing space based on an assessment they did of their buildings. The average school building age is 60 years old, 20 years older than comparable districts. Primary building systems are overdue for replacement in all buildings. It takes two school years to rebuild a building, during which children need to be placed somewhere. Clarendon is one of approximately six buildings that may be used as swing space.
 - PPS has no plans to sell the Clarendon site.

Question and Answer

Question: How much does a new school cost to construct?

Wynde: Cost varies according to size, use, etc. Gave examples of \$120 million for a high school for 1,500 students and \$24 million for a K-8 school with 500 students.

Question: How much will it cost to bring the Clarendon space up to the point where students could be housed longer term?

Wynde: Approximately \$6 million. PPS is in the process of conducting another seismic study.

Question: How practical is Clarendon as a swing space? What age groups could be accommodated?

Wynde: The building's open plan is not popular anymore. PPS has no concrete plans for its use as a swing space. The age groups housed there depends on a variety of factors, but there will be constraints due to the space (e.g. could not place 800 high school students there).

Question: What is the time frame for developing a plan?

Wynde: 12 months from now. This planning is tied to conversations about high schools.

Question: How long would it take to do upgrades to make it habitable?

Wynde: 6-8 months, estimate.

Question: Out of 100 buildings in PPS, how many would realistically be able to use Clarendon, given location, student body size, age group, etc.

Wynde: Portland has a relatively low tolerance for long bus rides. In terms of size, he does not know the exact number, but there are a sizable number of K-5 schools with 400 or fewer students. Any one of Roosevelt's three schools would physically fit in the Clarendon building.

Question: What qualified Ball elementary school building for demolition?

Wynde: Ball was doing great as a school, but building was terrible. It had a septic tank, not sewer connection, no gym, etc. Ball was at the bottom of the list in a recent review of PPS buildings. A new school, Rosa Parks, was built at New Columbia.

Question: Is PPS considering opening Clarendon as a neighborhood school?

Wynde: Not likely.

Question: Could it be leased?

Wynde: Could happen.

Question: Any legal reason why an entity could not lease it? Is it so out of code that it could not be leased?

Wynde: Does not know about code. PPS currently leases the old Kenton School building to De La Salle North Catholic High School. De La Salle spent a bunch of money fixing it up. They have a long-term lease.

Question: Can they lease to for-profit entities?

Wynde: Does not know. PPS does not do it currently.

Community Input – Current Conditions

- Portland Police statistics only report those crimes when the police are called. The police do not know the true picture if occurrences are not reported.
- The school has its own security system – PPS might have higher numbers regarding crime.
- It is a black hole attracting stagnant energy. It used to be a vibrant place.
- Dumpsters are very flammable. Broken bottles everywhere. 2 x 4s to windows. It is a pit.
- Broken glass; human feces; traces of people camping out; plenty of places to hang out; long weeds.
- It is dark in the park and school at night. Are the lights being shot out or are they being turned off? It needs to get lit up. Lack of lighting is contributing to larger problems.
- Her granddaughter cannot go there anymore. It is trashy, there is broken glass and she does not like the graffiti.
- It could be a place of connection, but it is more like a wall now. She does not walk there now, even in the daytime. Neighbors cannot use that beautiful space. It is not a place where people can connect.
- Arson. People breaking into the roof. People camping with shopping carts. A friend's car was spray painted when she parked in front of the school. Some dancing happens under the roof – a positive thing. She likes local sports and other use. At night it becomes "turf", and it is not her turf, even though she lives there. It is 18th Street Gang turf.
- Her car has been egged, spray painted, etc.
- 18th street gang members entered school area.

Officer Gillentine: The best thing to do is call 911 when you see something. If the police get several 911 calls about a particular incident they will respond more quickly than if only one person calls. Also call Gillentine.

Discussion of Solutions

- Stephen Leiker reviewed short- and long-term possibilities in a brief presentation.
 - Tear the building down
 - Community center
 - Community garden

- Community Input and suggestions:
 - Commissioner Fish spoke at North Portland chairs meeting about community gardens and indicated that there is a 1,300 long wait list. A community garden will not happen in the short term if we go through the City. Every neighborhood wants a community garden. Commissioner Fish said that Parks is the very first part of the budget to be cut. It costs thousands of dollars to put in water and other infrastructure.
 - Tim Lyden of Portland Village School is trying to find a location for their next campus. They have looked at Clarendon and have offered to be part of solution. Portland Village School would like to partner with another organization (e.g. community center, small library, etc.) and use the space if PPS would allow it. They are the fastest growing charter school in Portland. They like the pods structure to the building.
 - Community health center
 - Teen center
 - After school center
 - Community center
 - Commissioner Fish recently spoke about the need for affordable senior housing in St. Johns. What about a place for seniors?
 - Tear the building down and put a field there until it is needed as a swing school.
 - Move the issue to the front burner and deal with it.
 - Make a joint venture between PPS and some other entity
 - Ask the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area for financial help.
 - Get it habitable. Structure the lease so that a non-profit could come in and pay for maintenance. Otherwise, it has to come down.
 - What is PPSs interest in 21st Century Community Schools? Wynde responded: 21st Century Schools include shared use of facilities (e.g., senior centers with schools). It needs buildings with flexible construction – movable walls – but that is not equivalent to the open classrooms structure at Clarendon.

Wrap Up

- PPS has provided a dumpster for the next volunteer community cleanup at Clarendon, on October 17, 2009 from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon.
- Tony Magliano, Acting Director of Operations, said that he hears neighbor complaints about lighting and will work on it. He mentioned that Community Caring Days and Hands on Portland are possible resources for Clarendon site. Tony gave neighbors the number for the PPS maintenance help desk – the one to call with issues: 503-916-3303.
- Neighbors responded that the issue of lighting has been raised many times with PPS but remains a problem. The timers do not work.
- Wynde stated he understands that the Clarendon School site is presently not a good place to be. Having the building used is the best outcome. Razing it would be preferable to non-use. He understands that it has dragged on long enough. PPS is not at a point where they can give us a plan, but they will try to get a plan ASAP. . He further commented that after-hours illegal use and maintenance issues are a problem at all PPS buildings, not just closed ones.

Meeting concluded at 8:30 PM.

Submitted by Mary Wheeler
PNA, Board Member at Large