



Torrey Pines Community Planning Board

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www.torreypinescommunity.org

BOARD MEMBERS: Dennis E. Ridz, Chair, dennisridz@hotmail.com; Adam Gevanthor, Vice-Chair & PRC Chair, Kenneth Jenkins, Treasurer; Faye Detsky-Weil, Past Chair; Patti Ashton; Michael Belch; Barbara Cerny; Michael Foster, Cliff Hanna; Greg Heinzinger; Carole Larson; Dr. Norman Ratner, Charles Richmond, Noel Spaid, Pat Whitt.

From: Dennis E. Ridz, Chair
Torrey Pines Community Planning Board
14151 Boquita Drive
Del Mar, CA 92014

To: Comischell Rodriguez, Board President
Del Mar Union School District Board of Trustees
225 Ninth Street
Del Mar, CA 92014

Date: December 14, 2009

Re: Proposed Closure of Del Mar Hills Academy of Arts and Science

For some time, the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board (TPCPB) has been following the activities of the 7/11 District Advisory Committee for the Del Mar Union School District (DMUSD). The TPCPB applauds the creation of the 7/11 Committee by the DMUSD as a sound method of providing a public forum to answer questions related to the possible closures of a District school. As the 7/11 Committee moves to make their recommendations to the DMUSD Board of Trustees, the TPCPB has chosen to voice its concerns regarding the possible selection of the Del Mar Hills Academy of Arts and Science for closure.

The TPCPB is acting in its official capacity as sanctioned by the City of San Diego and the California Coastal Commission. The TPCPB is guided by the Torrey Pines Community Plan (TPCP) which was authorized by the City of San Diego on January 10, 1995 and adopted by the California Coastal Commission in April of 1996. The TPCP under its COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT (pages 93-94) directly addresses the vital importance of the Del Mar Hills Academy and the Del Mar Heights School to the community. The issue of converting the Del Mar Hills Academy into a District administrative and maintenance facility is covered under the COMMERCIAL ELEMENT of the TPCP on page 75. Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), we believe that a school closure meets the definition of a "project" under CEQA guidelines. We are taking this opportunity to provide specific feedback as it relates to both the Torrey Pines Community Plan and broader environmental issues. The TPCPB reserves the right to further address issues related to possible school closures and commercialization within a residential neighborhood.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT GOALS & POLICIES

The TPCP on page 98, establishes several goals directly related to the schools within the Torrey Pines Community. Goal 2. "Maximize accessibility to community facilities for all members of the community."
Goal 3. "Ensure that students have safe, direct access to their schools."

The possible closure of the Del Mar Hills Academy thwarts Goal 2 by forcing some students to attend school facilities outside of the Torrey Pines Community. Furthermore, it is the opinion of the TPCPB that forcing children to cross Del Mar Heights Road could compromise student's safety and thwart direct access to their schools (Goal 3). Currently, many students walk to the Del Mar Hills Academy. The additional costs associated with providing safe access to the Del Mar Heights School needs to be considered and addressed.

The TPCP on page 99, codifies POLICIES related to the Community Facilities Element.

Policy 6.d. states that "Joint use agreements with the elementary schools should be secured. If these schools should ever be declared surplus by the school district, they should be purchased by the City and developed as neighborhood or community parks."

Policy 7 states that "Both the Del Mar Union and San Dieguito High School Districts should utilize every mechanism available to ensure that adequate school facilities are maintained. Future residential development east of I-5 should not negatively impact schools with the Torrey Pines Planning Area."

It is the opinion of the TPCPB that turning the Del Mar Hills Academy into office and storage space for non-educational purposes meets the definitive of "**surplus**". Therefore in the event that the DMUSD selects this site for closure, this surplus school should not be considered except for use as a community or neighborhood park. The 7/11 Advisory Committee website comments on the enrollment projections by stating that "It is impossible to predict with great accuracy how the birth rates will change, whether people with children will move in or out, and the more years forward one projects, the more this unknown compounds." The recent decline in housing costs within Torrey Pines has made homes around the Del Mar Hills Academy somewhat more affordable to younger families with children. The TPCP Policy 7 indicates that an effort to ensure adequate school facilities be followed.

COMMERCIAL ELEMENT

The TPCP addresses the issues of the Commercial Element within the community on page 75.

Goal 3. "**Prohibit the encroachment of commercial development** into areas other than those designated commercial, especially into residential, open space and environmentally sensitive areas." The TPCPB has historically opposed commercial development within zoned residential settings. Of course, the TPCPB's Project Review Committee would give this possible conversion of a school into administrative office and maintenance yard a full public hearing before judging the merits of this project.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The 7/11 District Advisory Committee has wisely chosen to partially address the environmental issues including traffic and the Coastal Commission oversight. The 7/11 Committee for financial reasons has chosen not to study each proposal but rather wait for a 'final' recommendation to be made. The TPCPB believes that even a preliminary review using CEQA guidelines of alternative proposals would eliminate the possible choice of closing the Del Mar Hills as the preferred alternative. CEQA is intended to assess impacts of a project, then avoid or mitigate the impacts to the lowest level. Also, the traffic related concerns might well raise issues under California Senate Bill 375.

In summation, it is the belief of the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board that the possible selection of the Del Mar Hills Academy for closure is not a viable solution and is contrary to the guidelines and policies of the Torrey Pines Community Plan.

Dennis E. Ridz, Chair TPCPB