

PIEDMONT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Council Chambers, City Hall
120 Vista Avenue
Piedmont, California 94611

MINUTES OF
Special Meeting of the Governing Board

November 17, 2009

CALL TO ORDER

Board President Gadbois called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education of Tuesday, November 17, 2009 to order at 4:06 p.m. and led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ESTABLISHMENT
OF QUORUM

President Ray Gadbois, Vice President Roy Tolles; Board Members June Monach, Martha Jones, Rick Raushenbush

OTHERS PRESENT AT SPECIAL
SESSION

Constance Hubbard, Superintendent
Michael Brady, Assistant Superintendent, Business Services

REVIEW AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEM

Conduct Public Hearing and Possible
Action by Board on Turf Material to be
Used to Construct New Havens Play Field

President Gadbois prefaced the discussion by stating that the purpose of this Special Meeting is to review the turf material for the new Havens play field; the purpose is not to discuss use restrictions of the field. The Recreation Commission has been holding public hearings regarding use restrictions and the Board will review those use restriction proposals at the appropriate time at a future meeting.

He continued that the original vision for the new Havens play field always included plans for the play field to be made with artificial turf. Because several community members expressed concern about the use of artificial turf, and rubber fill in particular, the school board agreed to hold a special meeting to hear the concerns.

President Gadbois said the District Green Committee also held a public workshop on this issue to provide information and receive feedback.

Assistant Superintendent Brady stated that on September 24, 2009, a community meeting was held by the District Green Committee to inform the public about the proposed design and use of the new Havens play field and solicit feedback about criteria. Community members, parents, students, staff and the City Recreation Department representatives attended the meeting.

Areas for Discussion:

- History of the Havens play field design
- Rationale for synthetic fields in Piedmont
- Review of current Havens design
- Concerns about synthetic turf
- Alternative to synthetic turf
- Board of Education considerations and decision

History of Havens Play Field Design:

- Becker design for a new school
- Webcor collaboration to rebuild Havens
- Two-story building to create play space
- Design with a synthetic field in mind
 - "soft-surface" play area

- primary use for younger children (K-5)
- community resource for all of Piedmont

Rationale for Synthetic Field:

- Decreased maintenance requirements
- All-weather play
- Greater public availability
- No need for pesticides and fertilizers
- Resource conservation (water)
- Use for recycled tires
- Limited play space in city limits of Piedmont

Review of Current Havens Design:

- Synthetic turf dimensions: approximately 25,000 feet (140x180 ft)
- Design has NO provisions for lighting
- Limited field lines (soccer) for Under 8/Under 10 players
- Field + Havens rebuild are DSA-approved
- Partially subsidized by City of Piedmont

Concerns about Synthetic Turf:

- What is it made of?
- Health concerns
- Environmental concerns
- Hidden costs with regard to maintenance
- Precautionary approach until more research is completed

Infill Rubber: What is it made of?

- Rubber pellets
- From new or recycled tires
- Products vary
- Some contain sand (such as Witter Field)

Infill Rubber: Health Concerns

- Excessive heat
 - manufacturers acknowledge fields run 10-30 degrees hotter than natural grass. Turf burn (carpet burns)
- Injuries
 - "turf toe"
 - staph infections

Crumb Rubber: Possible Environmental Concerns

- Toxic exposure
 - chemicals with links to health effects
- Runoff
 - leaching into soils or storm drains
- Disposal
 - infill needs replacement every 8-10 years

The District has done air quality testing looking for vapors and chemicals.

Hidden Maintenance of synthetic turf:

- Increased vacuuming or raking for heavily used fields (Witter Field maintenance done every 5 weeks)
- Repairing loose seams or burns
- Disposal costs

- Disinfection with antibacterials and pesticides

What research has been completed?

- Norwegian study 2006 – VOCs from rubber infill can be aerosolized
- OEHHA study 2007 – 49 chemicals can be released from tire shreds
- There is no scientific consensus on the level of exposure that may cause harm, or the nature of harm
- This area requires further study

Alternatives to Crumb Rubber:

- Natural grass
- Grass advancements:
 - shoot density
 - increased strength of recovery
 - improved shade/heat tolerance
 - can be maintained without pesticides
- Alternative infills (“grass” is still plastic)
 - organic cork and coconut husk (Geosafe)
 - Thermoplastic Elastomer – plastic pellets
 - Flexsand – Elastomer-coated sand
 - Virgin rubber

Board of Education Considerations:

- Health concerns
- Environmental concerns
- Cost
 - installation
 - maintenance
 - replacement
 - disposal
- Other ?

A questionnaire was developed to send to the turf vendors and was provided at the public information table. Supplementary information was also provided at the public information table which included water usage, pesticides, fertilizers, and related costs.

The present design does not call for any irrigation (drainage). There are already hose bibs at the site. If a grass option was chosen, there would be drainage issues.

Because of contaminated soil discovered at the Havens site, additional cost was incurred to remove the contaminated soil and bring in treated soil. The treated soil made the surface hard. If the District chose to use natural grass, there would be more cost involved to remove all of the treated soil (approximately \$79,000) that was just put down and spend another \$50,000 to bring in top soil. Also, it would cost approximately \$200,000 to bring water service from the street to the site in order to water natural grass, and an additional \$19,000 for the irrigation service itself.

The cost of \$200,000 is already included in the program budget for the new play field. The warranty is for eight years.

Board Member Monach reported that over a dozen emails were received regarding this topic and one was a petition from parents with about 115 signatures stating their concerns.

President Gadbois opened the public hearing.

Margaret Ovenden, Beach parent and Chair of the District Green Committee, expressed her concern about the crumb rubber infill for the synthetic turf as related to long-term health effects. She urged the Board to choose either the coconut infill or natural grass.

Jill Lindenbaum, Havens parent, advised that the Linda Beach field was too hot to play on a lot of the time. Although there is no long-term health assessment on the crumb rubber infill, a precautionary approach should be taken. The school children will be using the field on a daily basis. She hoped that the Board would choose natural grass for the play field, and her second alternative would be the Geoturf.

Parent Heather Clapp thanked the Board for offering a venue for the community to speak out on this issue. She and her husband are concerned about the heat level of the turf that tire crumbs give off during the summer. If the cost of natural grass is prohibitive, the second choice would be for the organic infill. There is no standardized testing for tire waste.

Shannon Bloemker, parent, a recent Piedmont resident who moved from Boston, shared that it was the school her children attended in Boston – the International School of Boston - that installed the Geoturf. She chaired the Building and Grounds Committee and she brought that choice to the school. There was no chance grass could grow in that school's play area because of the shading. Parents did not want crumb rubber. The children were thrilled and are still playing on it. There are also 200 installations in Europe that have the same turf.

Jon Elliott, parent, stated he is an Environmental Health and Safety Consultant. He is in favor of the organic infill, one of the issues being durability.

Morrissa Sherman, Havens parent, is very concerned about the environmental toxins related to a crumb infill, particularly because her child is asthmatic, making her more sensitive to heat exhaustion and chemicals. She urged the Board to use natural grass or, as a second choice, organic infill.

Margaret Ovenden read a statement by parent Tracy Woodruff. Ms. Woodruff stated the issue is about choosing a product which children will be exposed to for many hours, therefore she favors natural grass or an infill or coconut husk/cork.

There being no one else from the public wishing to speak, the public hearing was closed.

Board discussion followed in which all Board members expressed their preference for organic infill.

Board Member Raushenbush stated that, to him, safety is the number one issue to be considered by the Board. Toxic evaluation is an issue where there is never going to be a clear answer. There has been no comprehensive risk assessment on actual exposure. There will always be open questions. While he does not think there is much contrary data, there is an alternative for a synthetic turf that is organic and does not implicate any of the issues of concern, therefore, he is in favor of that. Durability, less heat and conservation of water are his considerations for being in favor of the organic infill.

Board Member Jones also favored organic infill rather than natural grass; to her, it was not the cost issue but that she does not believe natural grass would work due to anticipated constant use.

It was moved by Board Member Raushenbush, seconded by Board Member Monach, and passed unanimously to direct staff to investigate utilizing a synthetic turf such as the coconut husk and cork infill, or some other similar organic infill, for use of the new Havens play field, without increasing the Guaranteed Maximum Price, and to move forward with the contract.

Board Member Raushenbush requested to amend his motion to include that the Board be advised if there is any deviation to the construction schedule due to this issue. Board Member Monach accepted the amendment.

Board Member Tolles requested that if, for some reason, we get to the end of the summer and timing is an issue, the installation should be done properly rather than on time. He did not request this as an amendment to the motion.

Superintendent Hubbard advised the Board that all of this will go through Webcor Builders. They will do the installation under these parameters, but the District will set the specifications.

Board Member Jones thanked everyone for all of the research done on this issue.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business and with no objection by the Board, President Gadbois adjourned the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

RAY GADBOIS, Board President
Piedmont Unified School District
Board of Education

CONSTANCE HUBBARD
Secretary, Piedmont Unified School District
Board of Education