

PORTER RANCH NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Special Hearing, November 1st, 2005
Shepherd of the Hills Church, Porter Ranch

1. **Welcome:** Becky Leveque, PRNC President, 7:14 p.m.
2. **Flag Salute:** Joe Martin, PRNC Board

3. Introductions: Becky Leveque

a. **Councilman Greig Smith** explained why neighborhood councils were started and gave a brief history of Porter Ranch Neighborhood Council. He segued into how the development of Porter Ranch included having a school built and how it's now time to resolve this issue. He said that over \$12 million has been collected to build a school. Porter Ranch wants the school to be built, and there are students there who will attend.

B, Special guest: **John Lauritzen, LAUSD Board of Education, District 3.** John gave a short informational presentation of what the Board is interested in doing for the community. (Board of Education Member _____ Brown was also introduced but did not speak).

C. **Guest speaker [Governor] Roy Romer, Superintendent, L.A. Unified School District.** Supt. Romer, who arrived on crutches, made a commitment to the stakeholders and Board members of Porter Ranch Neighborhood Council that a school will be built. He outlined what the Board of Education is doing to improve academic performance. He also described the process that needs to be undertaken to build a new school. He mentioned that the L.A. schools are presently 180,000 seats short. To address this, schools are being financed and have already gone through three phases of a four-phase project. The fourth phase is to build 25 schools, all elementary schools. In the San Fernando Valley, there are four elementary schools planned. Overall, all elementary schools will operate on a traditional calendar.

On a positive note, the former Governor of Colorado noted that academic performance is up in the elementary schools: Six years ago, students in this district were scoring 26% over the API. Now, it's up to 87%. He noted that is a very rapid change for six years and that there is no other metropolitan district in California where that has taken place as quickly.

Also in the elementary schools, six years ago, 26% of the students were scoring over 600 whereas now, 95% are scoring over 600. He said that change came from very deliberate policies that include: teaching to high standards, intensely training teachers, inserting coaches in schools to continue professional development, and doing periodic diagnostic assessments in reading and math to let the Board of Education know how to improve the instruction process. Supt. Romer said this was the strategic theory of change that has been used and it has done very well in the elementary schools.

Unfortunately, the scores have not been as good in the middle

schools or high schools. In the middle schools, they are just a little better than the state average. He noted that wasn't nearly good enough. He said that the Board of Education wants to make education more personal to the children. In the middle schools and high schools, they are moving toward a policy for new schools where students will be part of a small learning community of not more than 500 with a student teacher ratio of 20 to 25 students per teacher. Currently, that number is about 40 to one.

In the high schools, he said they want every student known and have an adult advocate for each student. He stated that they are now losing too many youngsters because they get lost in a crowd. The schools will still be built to accommodate 2,000 students but will be broken down to smaller units for teaching purposes.

When he became superintendent, Mr. Romer said that the District had no confidence in building schools with the Belmont Elementary School situation an example. At that time, leadership came from the construction guys. Now, the superintendent said they have a competent crew running their Facilities Division and they want to help finish the last phase. He closed his presentation by asking for the support of Porter Ranch in making that happen.

4. Questions for Superintendent Romer read by PRNC President Becky Leveque. (This information is paraphrased and is a sampling of the questions asked and the responses given. Duplicate questions were not included in these minutes or questions that were outside of this issue).

1. What guarantees are there that Measure Y's funding will be used for schools?
Supt. Roy Romer: A letter states that this is so; It's going to happen.

2. Where: in Porter Ranch would a new school be built?
Supt: A site has been designated. Once the ballot is passed, they will begin to confirm with people where it is best to locate the school. **Joel Polachek, LAUSD Real Estate Project Director, San Fernando Valley**, who is involved in the planning process, was then asked to join the presentation on stage by Superintendent Romer. Joel said that the site selection process involves looking at a number of sites. A site at Mason and Sesnon has been set aside for a future elementary school. The planning documents state that land has been set aside.

3. How soon would it be before a new school would be built?
Joel: It takes approximately four to six years. Four for an elementary school and closer to six for a high school. He said the initial phase is the site selection process followed by a series of meetings where the community and the School District have a "give and take," then at a fourth meeting, a recommendation takes place and goes to the Board of Education. After that, the design process starts which takes a year and half before the building is constructed.

Supt: It: takes two years to do the construction and two years in normal circumstances for the process. He said he thought it would be closer to four years than six for a high school.

4. What if Measure Y does not pass?

Supt: We still have needs to be met. A number of schools are on extended - sessions because we're short. We would have to pass a Bond to build a school but if it doesn't pass, we'll keep fighting until we get the problem solved - now or later.

5. If the developer's fees were set aside, haven't Porter Ranch taxpayers already paid for the school? Is Measure Y asking us to pay a second time for a school?

Supt: You don't pay for your own school. We're building schools where children are. We're paying for them based on where people are in the District. That's the right and proper thing to do. We're taking money from wherever people are. You don't just take money from an area and say, "That's all you get because you live in a poor area." There aren't boundaries where children live or go to school. It takes about \$32 million to build a new K -8 school. LAUSD's cost is \$16 million from taxes collected from Porter Ranch. Clearly the money is there. : The developer's fees are used in for the total school program, together with bond dollars, which go into a pool. About \$80 million is raised with developer fees each year but it's not enough. We supplement that with bond dollars for the whole school district.

6. With the shared cost from Senate Bill 50, can you get it for less if you already have the land?

Supt: If the land is free, it reduces the cost. The State of California doesn't participate at 50%, but at 40%. We get shared cost from the state on a matching basis (40%) but we don't get monies from the Parks. The Parks Department doesn't contribute to construction costs for schools. Only libraries get a grant from the State, which helps them maintain over period of time.

7. Can funds generated from bonds/developers be held for future schools?

Supt: No, we don't do business that way. We take the money and put it where the need is. We take the money from those who have the capacity to pay.

8. We're paying a lot in taxes now and we are fortunate to have many people who can afford to live in Porter Ranch with good incomes. Can you address the time delay on the promise made to provide a school at Porter Ranch? Our son was in elementary school when it was first promised. Now he's 30 years old. We're kind of feeling left out.

Supt: We (Supt. and his wife) have 18 grandchildren. [If it was me] I would join the revolution, marching in the streets, if that were the case. It's not right to delay. Measure Y, this Board [of Education] and this Superintendent is very determined to do this at the quickest possible moment. We feel it needs to be done immediately. You have a school board who is dedicated to doing this the right way and that's the schedule we're going on

9. Chapelle (the Porter Ranch development company) has land and has offered to give money for a school to be built in lieu of paying taxes when they sell homes. Can this be done?

John Lauritzen, LAUSD Board of Education: We have had lengthy discussions with Chapelle's people. We're waiting for them to get back to us with a concrete proposal. If they'll come to us with that, including the location, we're more than willing to talk to them.

Supt: Can we deal separately with one developer? I don't think we're legally able to do that. But if they want to put up the money, upfront, I'm sure we can work with them but there are legal aspects to that.

Becky Leveque, PRNC President: How can we make this happen?

John: We're more than willing to discuss this.

Julie Kornstein, L.A Board of Education Member: When I represented Porter Ranch area, I worked very hard to make sure land was set aside before development began. It's been a long process. As John mentioned, a 7-acre plot of land was set aside by Sesnon and Mason, free to the District except if it needs grading. There's another 15 acres set aside for a Middle School. I'm not in those negotiations anymore because I represent another part of the Valley but I am a resident of Porter Ranch. As such, I'm very familiar with the overcrowding. If the developer wanted to build a school, we would have to investigate the legality and get School Board approval. John and I are two out of seven Board Members. In other Districts, developers do build schools, so it may be a win - win situation. I'm doing everything I can do to move this along as fast as I can.

Becky: We can get a group together to help move this process forward?

Supt: Let's talk about the procedure. If there are to be conversations, I have to have it in an official way. The Board [of Education] should be a part of it; the Facilities Department has to be a part of it. We can arrange a meeting, if the PRNC wants to be a part of it.

Julie: We're really looking at whether a deal could be negotiated with Chapelle. Then there's Measure Y. It depends on what happens. If the bond measure does pass, we have already approved Porter Ranch for a school.

John: If we build with bond funds, we get matching funds from the state, which we may not be able to get if we build with the developer's fees.

Supt: If we don't pass Measure Y, it may not be available.

10. What needs to happen to get a high school and what is the soonest that could happen?

John: We first need a whole lot more students. I won't say it can't happen but I don't think there are enough high school students in Porter Ranch to merit a high school.

11. The shopping center only took two years to build. Why would it take so long to build a school?

Supt: You have to do it by the book in California. They want to protect students over a long period of time. We're pushing the limits of the State regulations right now. We can't shorten that time line because of the laws.

12. How about using schools that are closed?

John: Schools aren't overcrowded. (Audience disagrees). The five schools along the 118 are under-enrolled; none of schools west of Balboa are on a year - round calendar.

Julie: As we build more schools, we will not need to bus kids in the West Valley. If Measure Y passes, it's going to be a whole different picture in the West Valley. Children will be going to their neighborhood schools.

13. There are 800 students in a school built for 400.

Supt.: We will go at it again. In regard to the demographics, we don't have these figures in our head. [What we do know is] we have to take care of the children. We want to do it without extended sessions. [Therefore] we would have to build more schools.

14. Can we build a school ourselves - a Charter school?

Supt: You can't build a Charter School with District funds but anyone can build a Charter school. Charter Schools can supplement public schools but I don't think it's wise to take the responsibility of public schools. We can't rely on Charter Schools. **(Superintendent Romer exits the meeting to make another appearance. He says John and Julie will continue answering questions.)**

15. Do you think our students going to private schools has caused the shortage of high school students?

John: I think there just isn't the projection of that many high school students in this area. Chapelle was going to do a survey of the area. They still have not provided that to date. We're anxious to see their data. It doesn't mean we can't build high school seats. We're committed to small groups of 500 students.

Julie: We have been provided information on two other schools. We will have enrollment drops when the schools are built. We estimate we'll have 1700 high school students [here] by 2016. We need to plan ahead. If the students are to be here, we need to plan ahead.

16. Can parents request a Charter School?

John: A Charter School has no responsibility to anyone but their own Board. They don't have to take your kids into their school. There are a lot of reasons to not have your only school in the area be a Charter School. There are no alternatives if it's the only school.

Julie: We have elementary schools that have done equally as well as Charter Schools. The figures are a little skewed.

16. Question about Sorrento and Renaissance schools and why students were transferred elsewhere.

Julie: We need to look at redrawing our school boundaries. There's no reason why youngsters should have to travel past neighborhood schools. School boundaries change about every ten years.

17. Is there any truth to the article recently published that the graduating class of 2012 would have to take _____ to enroll in a university?

Supt: Statistics of high school students are not representative due to private schools.

18. Many homeowners are taking on heavy debt to send their kids to private schools due to overcrowding.

John: Our high schools are not capped out. Monroe High School is the only secondary school on a year-round calendar. We have adequate rooms for all high school and middle schools. Granted, if everybody came back from private schools, it would not be the case.

Julie: There are high schools opening up throughout the SF Valley. Once a school is capped, they cannot bring in more children.

John: We have a problem in the North Valley keeping the levels of schools where they are. Some schools are poaching students from other schools and it creates a problem. The ideal situation is to build schools so everyone can attend neighborhood public schools of their choice, but there are still going to be people who opt for a private school.

19. How will schools support the non-academic career path?

John: We will continue to work on that. We are working with occupational centers, but classes in career pathways need to expand for those students who select that.

Becky announces questions need to end so the meeting can close by 9 p.m.

John requests that anyone with questions call his office directly at:

(818) 718-2360, the phone number for the local district. John also extends an invitation to stakeholders to attend the Board's monthly Advisory Council meeting, Nov. 12, 9:00 a.m. and he will address any other questions.

Becky reads additional questions:

20: How much per \$100,000 per home would Measure Y add to tax bills?

John: \$60 per \$100,000 assessed valuation per year.

21. Why haven't the vacancies been filled on the Citizens Oversight Committee?

John: All three vacancies were filled at the last Board meeting.

22. Comparing what students get from private education as opposed to public education, why should parents send their children to public school?

John: Depending on what age your children are and what the class ratio is, parents can make that decision. In K – 3, the ratio is 20 – 1 but it goes up to 40-1 over that.

Julie: We have some of the most overcrowded classrooms in the nation. We are in

the process of having Kindergarten go a full day. Within the next two years, all Kindergarten will go a full day.

23. Question about a recent abduction of a student at Frost Middle School and the issue of students' safety in the schools.

John: Does not have any specific information to address this.

City Council member Greig Smith closed the meeting saying, "When we finally cut the ribbon on that [the new school], you can say you were there when it got going."

Becky: Assured stakeholders that all things are possible and the Porter Ranch Neighborhood Council will make it happen.

Hearing adjourned: 9:00 p.m.

Minutes taken by Pat Kramer, PDQ Personnel