Hamilton Meeting Notes from Community Conversation

On March 19, 2024, Torrance Unified Chief Business Officer, Dr. Keith Butler, and Director of Communications, Sara Myers met at Hamilton with 11 community leaders for 2.25 hours on the topic of the future of the Hamilton school site. The leaders represented Little League, Softball, and the Homeowners/Neighborhood Assoc. Topics also included the Transition Special Education Program and Adult Education classes.

The meeting was productive and conducted in good faith, especially given everyone's position at the start of the meeting. Dr. Butler opened the meeting by explaining the "Why"—(Why is the Torrance Unified Board looking at this issue again, now?), and then explained that our goal was to ask for, and listen to, what these respective groups need if Hamilton is repurposed. Everyone was measured and respectful, even as Dr. Butler acknowledged that we were sure that the most ideal outcome for these groups would be for Torrance Unified to go away and not revisit this issue. We assured the group that **no decisions have been made**, and we assured them that we are genuinely interested in their input which will be valued as we walk down this path, not knowing at this point if this change will actually happen.

The Why:

We covered the following points to explain why we are relooking at this issue:

- Both the zoning and successful sale of the townhomes next door to Hamilton behind the church have continued to place a renewed focus on the potential for the site. We assured them that as we work with developers we would be looking for similar density—not 1,000 apartments in the space
- The condition of the Hamilton buildings and parking lot, and the significant resources needed just for safety and appearance, but even that would be a band-aid
- The opinion of the Special Education Department is that the inclusion of the Transition program into the North campus is good for students and that we will likely work for this regardless of what happens to the Hamilton property because it is in the best interest of those students
- The fiscal storm that California, and thus school districts including ours, faces means that for the fiscal health of the District as a whole, this issue needs to be explored.

Questions and Understanding:

During the discussions, the group had several good questions and sought clarification on a variety of issues.

- **When will this happen?** Torrance Unified reps assured the North leaders that the process will take approximately two years to choose a developer, complete planning, and move to construction, including City approvals.
- **What about the loss of parkland?** Torrance Unified said the current ballfields are not considered public parkland since are locked up and not available to the community as a whole. While a developer makes the final plan and the City approves it, Torrance Unified will instruct potential

developers that accessible public greenspace is important for this development and will work with the chosen developer and the City to see if anything can be included to develop additional greenspace in the North area.

- **What about Levy? Why not make that site surplus?** The 7-11 Commission visited this, and because Levy had significant modernization done to accommodate Hull Middle School students while Hull was undergoing modernization, it is in much better condition and centrally located for all residents.
- **Can you cut the parcel in half?** Torrance Unified explained that we could, but that significantly decreases the value to a developer. Dr. Butler promised that as the financial picture gets clearer we will share that information.
- **Can the teams get donations from big corporations to keep the fields at Hamilton?** We talked about the revenue that will come from new students, and from putting proceeds after all the costs of investing in fields into income-generating property for Torrance Unifed. It would be tough for a corporation to match that, plus a corporation would be a sizable one-time donation versus the other sources being ongoing.
- **Could volunteers help maintain Hamilton for less cost?** They are ready to go with volunteers to work on Hamilton, for example filling potholes. Dr. Butler requested to hold off on that. Torrance Unified is responsible for this property can't allow unapproved donations for that kind of work. And even though we did pothole repair work last Fall, we likely need to do some more now due to the recent rains.
- **Could you put the fields in a City park?** It was pointed out that the City hosts the other three Torrance Little Leagues in city-owned park spaces and North Little League started in Columbia Park before it moved to Hamilton. Some members expressed that they don't want to take over a park and lock it up because there is not enough green space in North Torrance. But that is better than not having fields. We reiterated we will work with the City and the chosen developer regarding greenspace.
- **Why are there fewer and fewer Adult Education classes at Hamilton, versus Levy?** Likely a demand issue, but Dr. Butler supervises Adult Education and there has been no direction to decrease programming. In fact, direction has been given to significantly grow high school equivalency and high school diploma programs and marketing is currently taking place to help that.
- **Has the new development caused worse traffic?** Directed to the NTNA, have people been complaining about traffic on 182nd? Per Marianne, no, there were complaints before the units behind the church were built, but not lately. She invited any complaints to be forwarded to them so they could work with the city on any traffic mitigation measures.
- **If the fields go to a school what could this look like?** We talked this through, and given space considerations, we are likely looking at (in order) Lincoln, Magruder then Casimir. Yukon wouldn't work, and Carr is looking at expanded dual immersion and add new buildings.
- **Do Board Members have an interest and a personal understanding of the community in the North Area?** We assured them that yes, Dr. Anil Muhammed is elected by North residents (as is James Han—as well).

What the Leagues and Teams Need:

Discussions led to listening to their thoughts about what resources they need to continue their leagues successfully. Several of the representatives expressed that they are beginning to accept that a change is likely going to happen at some point, so in general they focused on what we can do to work together for what lies ahead:

- **LOCATION:** There have to be ball fields ***in North Torrance***. Torrance Unified agrees and we are looking both at school properties and potentially City properties (El Nido Park and Geunser Park) for both the Little League and Softball. One league leaders said "You **have to keep these fields in North** because they are feeders into travel ball and students playing ball at North High." Torrance Unified agrees.
- **QUANTITY:** There have to be at least two fields each for baseball and softball (4 fields total). Torrance Unified agreed.
- **OWNERSHIP: The leagues want their own space**, not for possession, but for volunteers to maintain the quality of the fields that they maintain and for the safety of the play area. Soccer tends to tear up fields and does not repair them. Torrance Unified reps acknowledged this request and that there would be things to work out about access to take care of the fields, and to protect their fieldwork. If new fields are at a school site, Torrance Unified is open to including mowing, for example, if the group thought that would be beneficial.
- **ACCESS:** They want there to be **a District policy**, not a site policy, regarding their access to new fields. Torrance Unified agreed that the request made sense.
- **TIMING:** The leagues are a twelve-month operation. For example, tournaments outside of the regular season are a big moneymaker for them. Torrance Unified understands. **The leagues don't want to lose a season** because of this. Torrance Unified reps understand, and our Board is clear that they don't want a lost season either. We explained that we can't guarantee that no activity would be missed in a twelve-month schedule, but we will work together when this gets closer—again, at least two years down the road.
- **BATHROOMS:** The teams really like that they have good bathrooms—most leagues have porta-potties and Hamilton's are seen by other leagues as "golden." Families can be here for 8 hours. Torrance Unified understands that.
- **SEATING & FOOD:** The team leaders said they need benches and a snack bar. Again, families can be here the whole day. Torrance Unfied understands.
- **STORAGE & PRACTICE:** The leagues need storage units for their equipment, plus a bullpen and a batting cage like they have now. Torrance Unfied understands.
- **MARKETING:** "Kids may leave for other leagues if we don't have our "home" in place." Can you help us market? Torrance Unified agreed that we will certainly publicize the new facilities and include links and connections for more information about the leagues. And, if there are new families here as part of the development that can lead to new families for baseball/softball.
- **PARKING:** The team leaders understand the current parking situation is a luxury, and might not be duplicated elsewhere, but the general consensus is that they would figure it out.

- **SNACKBARS:** We don't make money on registrations, but really from the snack bar. Torrance Unified agrees with including snack bars.
- **SECURITY:** They need a secure site with storage—they were broken into last May and a quad and field equipment was taken. Torrance Unfied agrees security is important.
- **SPONSORS:** Team leaders explained that if they leave, they can't ask donors for the same thing a second time—like scoreboards. Torrance Unfied understands, and that's why we're listening to know what needs to be included in the new fields and are willing to make investments.
- **LIGHTS:** Lights for the fields will be useful to extend play time.
- **HISTORY, FAMILY, PRIDE:** Torrance Unified appreciates that there is a generational history here that can't be replaced. We expressed that we would not be talking about this unless fiscal considerations were leading this way. We are committed to this process including community input.

Trust Building and Communication Going Forward:
We then talked about how to keep this dialog going. We all agreed to meet again after Spring Breack on **April 17th** with this same group (but they may choose to invite their full boards) to think about what else has developed in the meantime. Then, afte the second input meeting the District will come back with drawings. Torrance Unified is open to the idea of presenting those drawings at a broader Town Hall meeting. The community leaders agreed with Torrance Unified that the Town Hall should be constructive input, not arguing or mudslinging, or else we can't make progress as partners. Torrance Unified will also share sample RFPs with this group so that they can think about input into that.

We talked about how the leaders would take the messaging from this meeting back out to their groups, and they said that while they see repurposing Hamilton as likely, it will take time to build trust in the District and the Board.

Dr. Butler also stated that we plan to keep moving this forward in a transparent manner. The next Closed Session item will be when the Board needs to consider a draft developer RFP where negotiating items will be discussed. However, the groups will be notified of that agenda item when it is ready for public input.

Overall, a productive meeting.