

Upfront

Local news, information and analysis

City seeks more protection from Stanford expansion

City officials, residents question university's plans to manage anticipated traffic and housing problems

by Gennady Sheyner

What if you hosted a public hearing on the largest land-use project in Santa Clara County history and almost no one showed up?

That's what happened on Oct. 12, when county planners came to Palo Alto to gather residents'

thoughts about Stanford University's application for a new general-use permit, which would allow the university to build 2.275 million square feet of academic space, along with 3,150 housing units and 40,000 square feet of child care centers and other supporting

facilities by 2035.

Despite the scale of the project, and its potential impact on everything from the local housing market to traffic conditions, Palo Alto residents largely stayed home. Among the few who showed up at the Lucie Stern Community Center was county Supervisor Joe Simitian, a former Palo Alto mayor for whom the proceedings had a ring of familiarity. In 2000, when he was in his first stint as a

supervisor, Simitian helped craft the existing general-use permit (GUP), which authorized 2 million square feet of academic space and 3,000 housing units.

By many measures, the first-of-its-kind 2000 agreement has been a boon to both Stanford and the surrounding communities. Under the permit, Stanford has constructed (among many other things) a new Science and Engineering Quad to house its

engineering, medicine, humanities and sciences, and earth-science programs; the Knight Management Center to serve as home for the Graduate School of Business; and the Lorry I. Lokey Stem Cell Research Building, which includes biology laboratories and communal work spaces.

The university also has undergone an art Renaissance of sorts,

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HOLIDAY FUND



All Students Matter tutor Kathy Greenwood reads a book with Brentwood Academy student Nathalia Duarte as she holds her toy Hei Hei during their weekly time together at the East Palo Alto school.

Educating students, one by one

Volunteer tutors provide struggling kids with social-emotional stability along with academic help

by Elena Kadvany

Inside a quiet classroom at Brentwood Academy in East Palo Alto on Monday afternoon, Gyna Monroy reclined on a blue beanbag, carefully reading aloud from a picture book called "There's a Bird on Your Head!"

With a tutor's gentle prompting, the third-grader worked her way through more difficult words. She sounded out each letter in "idea" before she strung the whole word together, excitedly.

Gyna is one of the more than 2,000 students served by All Students Matter, a volunteer-driven nonprofit providing literacy, math and social-emotional

support to elementary school students in the Ravenswood City School District. All Students Matter received \$5,000 from the Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund this year, paying for new volunteer training that the organization's founder described as "invaluable."

As All Students Matter has grown — from 15 people informally volunteering in one Ravenswood school 10 years ago to more than 200 volunteers at six schools — so have the needs of the students it serves. This is reflected in the revamped training, which now consists of one

hour focused on literacy and, new last year, one hour on social-emotional support.

All Students Matter Executive Director Carolyn Blatman, who is unpaid, said the addition of social-emotional training is a direct result of seeing more students struggling with unstable

housing conditions in East Palo Alto. The number fluctuates throughout the year, but most recently, 44 percent of Ravenswood students were identified as homeless, she said. Many others live in overcrowded

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TRANSPORTATION

In Crescent Park, a push to end traffic gridlock

Residents to seek solutions for the daily line of cars on neighborhood streets

by Sue Dremann

Fed up with the daily traffic gridlock on their neighborhood's streets, Crescent Park residents are banding together to get the City of Palo Alto's attention.

For hours each day, Crescent Park residents are plagued by the hundreds of vehicles that jam the streets within blocks of University Avenue, from Middlefield Road to East Crescent Drive. They say their battle just to get in and out of their driveways on weekday afternoons.

On so-called Carmageddon days, when there is total gridlock, drivers start making illegal — and dangerous — turns, drive in oncoming lanes and speed in search of a side street that might be less congested, they said.

Unfortunately, there aren't any.

About 40 residents met with Councilwomen Karen Holman and Lydia Kou on Nov. 19 at a meeting convened by Center Drive residents Greg Welch and Ann Lewnes.

"We can't have gridlock forever," Lewnes said, noting that on multiple occasions she could not get out of her driveway.

The issue for all is safety, the residents said. Holman, who lives near the corner of Forest Avenue and Middlefield Road, agreed. One day while at home "I heard two car wrecks in 1 1/2 hours," she said.

Residents at the meeting considered completely banning cut-through traffic during commute hours, similar to a program recently implemented in Menlo Park's Willows neighborhood; others suggested starting a campaign now to find residentialist City Council candidates to elect in 2018.

Kou cautioned against short-term approaches rather than those that address the root of the problem, which she said was ongoing development. Residents should also insist that the city develop a traffic-demand management program "that has teeth in it," she said.

But Holman said limiting development will no longer solve the traffic problem.

"We've already passed that point," she said.

Kou and Holman said that while residents should seek emergency and short-term solutions, they should also look to pressuring the council, Santa Clara County and other stakeholders such as businesses, the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce and Stanford University into solving the traffic problems.

Stanford University is currently seeking permission from the county to expand. Kou said the university could be asked to develop traffic solutions benefiting the surrounding community.

"They can expand their very well-run shuttle system," for example, she said.

Residents could also demand that the council revisit last year's proposed employee transportation tax, which was put on the council's back burner, Holman said. The ordinance would tax any business with more than four employees per 1,000 square feet of office space, and the funds could be used to pay for shuttle services or transportation infrastructure, she said.

Residents at the meeting said there should be an ordinance requiring

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Holiday Fund

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homes with multiple families, are acting as parents to younger siblings or might not have the time or space to read quietly or get a good night's sleep. She said the organization has seen more and more students in recent years dealing with these kind of problems, which manifest in students acting out in the classroom.

All Students Matter has also brought in organizations like the counseling nonprofit *Cassy* and youth mental health nonprofit *Children's Health Council* to speak to volunteers.

The new training helps volunteers "instill patience and love for the kids," said Jeanette Kennedy, a volunteer who has become All Students Matter's director of strategic planning and marketing. "(If) they're not paying attention that day, they're yawning, they're tired ... (the volunteer has) to be

able to just switch gears. Maybe instead of having them read to you if they're too tired that day, you read to them, and it's still literacy and it's still helping and it's still supportive."

The literacy training is now more like a workshop instead of a lecture and mirrors what the district provides to its own teachers. All Students Matter's part-time program manager, Keri Tully, a former teacher, developed the training in conjunction with Ravenswood's reading and writing specialists. (Tully is the only paid staff member at All Students Matter. The majority of the nonprofit's \$50,000 budget funds her salary; the rest goes towards books for students, lunch for teachers, literacy kits and other materials.)

The volunteers, like All Students Matter's founders, are mostly parents from neighboring, higher-achieving and more affluent districts. The nonprofit also offers monthly "coffees" for

volunteers to meet one another and ask questions. These events and the new training go a long way toward retaining volunteers, which in turn provides consistency to students and teachers.

Every Ravenswood teacher the nonprofit works with gets three trained volunteers each year and can ask them to support students however the teachers see fit. There is no pre-set agenda — flexibility Blatman said is unique in a community where outside organizations often "come in and say, 'We have the answer; here are your problems.'"

A teacher usually identifies a small set of students who are struggling and asks the volunteers to work with them one-on-one, targeting reading comprehension or finishing a homework assignment.

On Monday afternoon, four All Students Matter volunteers read quietly one-on-one with four Brentwood third-graders in a separate classroom. Many students the

organization works with are reading below their grade level — a trend across the district, where 81 percent of students are below grade level in reading and 88 percent in math — and the volunteers work to bring them up to speed. Early on, the district asked the nonprofit to focus explicitly on reading.

But it's more than just tutoring. As the students turned pages of their books, volunteers casually peppered them with non-academic questions and comments, like how their Thanksgiving was.

The volunteer "may be the one consistent adult that they can talk to," Blatman said. "There's not an adult to sit quietly and listen (to them). That's a rare thing and we can give that."

All Students Matter (ASM) serves a dual purpose: supporting teachers by helping students. The organization aims to increase teacher retention, which Kennedy said has improved in recent years.

For many teachers managing large classrooms, the support is invaluable, said Ji Wook Choi, who teaches third grade at Brentwood. The volunteers provide a level of differentiation and one-on-one attention that she isn't always able to, she said.

"I wouldn't be able to do my job without ASM," she said. "They really push my kids forward."

This year, All Students Matter met its goal of being in all six Ravenswood schools at all grades, from transitional kindergarten through fifth grade. Blatman said the organization has no plans to grow beyond Ravenswood — she thinks it's most effective working locally — but there are plans to refine the program and expand within the district. A math pilot project will start in early 2018, and they're working more intensively with students who are reading just below grade level.

Despite the volunteers' intention to keep the organization small, Tully sees potential in other regions in the Bay Area where, similarly, an affluent community borders a less-fortunate one, like Emerald Hills and Redwood City, Oakland Hills and Oakland or Marin County and Marin City. She hopes others replicate their work.

"It would be easy for any other community to say, 'We sure would like to do what you're doing,' and we would happily support them," she said. ■

More information about the Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund can be found on page 14 and also online at PaloAltoOnline.com/holiday_fund.

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Public Agenda

A preview of Palo Alto government meetings next week

CITY COUNCIL ... The council plans to have a joint meeting with the Public Art Commission, consider approving the reconstruction of the Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo, review comments on the Environmental Impact Report for the Stanford University General Use Permit and discuss the recently passed state bills on housing. The meeting will begin at 5 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 4, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 250 Hamilton Ave.

BOARD OF EDUCATION ... The school board will vote on a comment letter on a draft environmental impact report for Stanford University's general use permit (GUP) and on a contract with a firm to conduct the district's superintendent search; discuss a first interim financial report, data for A-G college requirements, a board policy on gifts, board member term limits and an annual report on the Strong Schools Bond, among other items. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 5, at the district office, 25 Churchill Ave.

COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE ... The committee plans to approve an audit of the city's financial statements; approve the Fiscal Year 2017 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report; and discuss the city's long-range financial forecast and pension liabilities. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 5, in the Community Meeting Room at City Hall, 250 Hamilton Ave.

UTILITIES ADVISORY COMMISSION ... The commission plans to consider a resolution amending utilities rules on billing adjustments; consider the 2018 Utilities Strategic Plan; and discuss the city's Renewable and Carbon Neutral Portfolio Strategy and the Sustainability and Climate Action Implementation Plan. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 6, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 250 Hamilton Ave.

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD ... The board plans to consider exterior improvements to a hotel at 180 Hamilton Ave.; and consider an application for deploying wireless communication equipment on utility poles in Midtown and south of Midtown. The meeting will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, Dec. 7, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 250 Hamilton Ave.

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION ... The commission plans to meet at 5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 7, in the Community Meeting Room at City Hall, 250 Hamilton Ave.