

## Charles Barrett Special PTA Meeting

October 17, 2016

6:00-7:00 PM

Attending: Alethia Baggett, Trey Billips, Dalila Chavez, Mary Coughlin, Alexis Crumbley, Carolina Lopez Cruz, Andrea Cuedrec, Sandra Fadoada, Mary Frank, Tom Goslin, Ronke' Hughes, Anna Jaeger, Erica Jones, Seth Kennard, Caryn Lester, Lidia Lopez, Angelica Lopez, Yamaría Merlo Lopez, Margaret Lorber, Katherine McCart, Ramon McMillan, Patrick McNabb, Erika Macias, Kelley O'Dell, Jeremy Peters, Jennifer Pulliam, Sabrina Reilly, Carmen Reyes, Melva Romero, Hilary Sadoo, Veronica Sanchez, Candi Sparrow, Alexis Stackhouse, Dawn Stump, Brad Tobin, Logan Theoharis, Jenny Topping, Kristen Weber, Garcia Wilson, Jeff Wilson, Jennifer Zwiselberger

Kristen Weber, PTA President, opened the meeting at 6:00 pm. The meeting agenda is as follows:

- I. Welcome-Contribute to Fall Appeal
- II. Redistricting Discussion with School Board Members
- III. Update from Planning Block 15
- IV. Priorities and Action Steps
- V. Next PTA Meeting –November 7<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm

After briefly reminding everyone to contribute to the Fall Appeal, Kristen introduced ACPS School Board members Margaret Lorber and Cindy Anderson who provide the following observations and perspectives regarding the redistricting process.

Margaret noted she is the school board liaison to Charles Barrett but is not on the redistricting committee. Cindy is the District B representative to redistricting and is close to the decision making process with that effort.

According to Cindy, when redistricting first started she felt it was too early to consider redistricting schools when the School Board did not know where they would be putting children affected by the redrawn lines. When she got on the board so tried to convince fellow committee members to slow the process down until the capacity issue could be resolved. While any changes will not start until the 2018-2019 school year, the board is discussing planning for short term relief for overcrowded schools with the use of trailers or relocatables.

Cindy Anderson indicated that the School Board is planning to acquire a pre-existing building on the West end to allow ACPS to have the capacity to move 638-650 students. Only if this happens will redistricting make sense in order to relieve congestion.

ACPS hired a group called Reingold, a local company, and GIS, a subcontractor, who uses software to create the proposed maps. A Review Committee was appointed in fall 2015 but the effort got stalled until recently because there was no new space to put children. Once the new School Board took over in February 2016, the system started looking for space. The budget called for a leased space but now the system will have to buy because the lease option is no longer available for the particular building they had in mind due to bankruptcy. The School Board is still working on the building purchase and that is why the timeline has been moved to start in 2018 not 2017 as originally planned.

Cindy herself is a TC Williams graduate and her kids attended local schools and survived a redistricting effort. She hopes to make the process as painless as possible for as many people as possible as well as

to move as few people as possible. She noted the School Board members are not doing the redistricting work. It is being directed by 35 people who make up the Redistricting Committee (Lauren Sandberg and Joe Davis are reps). The Redistricting Committee has been going back and forth with the Steering Committee which is made up of three School Board members (including Cindy; Hal and Ramee are the other two) on the issues. Mostly the Steering Committee is doing the work, meeting every other week.

Cindy urged everyone to attend one or both of the upcoming Community Meetings, taking place October 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, and again in November. These meetings give the public the opportunity to make comments about the different options. Community feedback will be factored into the discussion of the Steering Committee and then the maps will be redesigned and go back to the Redistricting Committee for review.

Cindy noted that the Community Meeting starts with the contractor outlining the rationale or criteria used to develop the maps followed by 90 minutes of a “gallery walk” where the maps are placed on easels and ACPS staff members stand nearby to collect feedback from community members about what they like and dislike about the various options; and Redistricting Committee members and School Board members will be available to answer questions. Cindy also urged parents to send emails and to express their likes and dislikes about each option. She apologized for not being able to respond to every single email she receives due to the high volume.

The following questions were asked by the attendees:

**Q1. In the list of priorities, could you talk about what you see as the most critical factors, i.e. diversity, walkability, etc.?**

A1. The first three map options were developed without any demographic info factored in. There are ten criteria and while Cindy could not remember all ten, she divided them in her mind into several buckets she finds most important. Three criteria fit into the space issue; three fit into the walkability category; and two into special programs and diversity. Margaret noted that while walking to school is great, Alexandria is a small city and maybe we should be looking at having more magnet schools focused on certain subjects. She would like to see more CETA schools for example or maybe another immersion program in a new language. There are so many models out there and we all should have an open mind as a community and think through our vision for the city and how we can offer a quality education to our unique population of students.

**Q2. Please talk about the status of grandfathering which is an emotional issue.**

A2. Cindy noted that we need to fill up the new school. The current space issue is what prevents her from saying everyone should be grandfathered. We first must secure a new building and then put the students in it and see where that leaves us. Margaret noted that every day new families move into neighborhoods and if we fully grandfather everyone we will be sending them outside their neighborhood school. She feels we need to put off this decision until we can address the overcrowding issue.

**Q3. Given that buying the new building is still questionable, is there openness on the School Board to delaying this decision until there is more certainty?**

A3. Cindy noted the decision was delayed before she and Margaret got on the board and they both agreed that without space, the decision should be delayed. ACPS is doing everything it can to get the building. It is not yet a done deal. They had one 60-day period which they reached and now they are on their second 60-day period which ends in November. No redistricting boundaries will be decided until the building issue is resolved.

**Q4. You noted that diversity data was not ready when the first three maps were created. Are these maps off the table? Are more coming out?**

A4. Cindy said the Steering Committee has still not decided and that more maps would be coming out next week for a total of six. She noted that last week there were five maps and the Review Committee went through an exercise where they put three dots on their favorite maps. Some members chose part of one map for the West end and another map for the East end and others were in the middle. During this process, maps one and two were not brought forward. Map three had some support for how it would reconfigure the West end but not the East end. Maps four and five were preferred for how they would reconfigure the East end. When map six comes out, it will attempt to bring together both West and East end elements.

**Q5. Some comments express this thought that if the building purchase falls through, redistricting falls apart? Is that true?**

A5. Cindy cannot say for sure. ACPS has to find another space and in the interim push for temporary space, and also consider trailers and relocatables especially for currently overcrowded schools that need an immediate solution, such as Mason, until lines are redrawn.

**Q6. Please talk about the 60 days being extended. What is the deadline for that?**

A6. Cindy noted the second 60 days comes at the end of November. By then ACPS will have a decision about the new building. It still has to go through the SDUP process and lots of construction has to be done. Stay tuned. There are a lot of vacant buildings but not of the type ACPS needs. The building they are looking at is six stories but only four can be coded for a school per the fire code..

**Q7. Several folks are concerned about the process and how it is leaving families in limbo and causing anxiety and stress.**

A7. Cindy noted how sorry she is and did not realize how upset people would get. She wants to be sure the building is all set and then let people know what the redrawn lines will be. Then the work of grandfathering will begin.

**Q8. For families with children who have IEPs, will there be an exemption if the services being received are not part of a citywide program?**

A8. Cindy noted the School Board had discussed this very issue and stated a policy—that children receiving citywide services in programs specific to autism or hearing impairment will be exempt. Kids with IEPs who are part of general education will be eligible to apply for an admin transfer to stay at their current school if they are redistricted out in order to do what is best for the child and to maintain continuity of their education specifically if there is a health, safety or disability issue.

After Margaret and Cindy departed, Doug Swizelberger, who is helping to lead the Block 15 campaign, spoke. He and his wife and 15 other families have been tracking redistricting since the spring and initially were not worried until they saw the maps and how affected Charles Barrett would be. They were shocked. Planning Block 15 includes part of Beverly Hills. Some of the maps put part of all of Planning Block 15 into the George Mason School district, that should is currently at 147% capacity. Two weeks after the first three maps were released, his family and a few others started meeting to discuss what they could do. They came up with several concrete ways to take action: attend meetings and communicate your perspective. Other schools have had a huge showing and were able to get maps one and two pushed aside, but Charles Barrett has not been present. This group has developed a one pager and

petition noting their opposition and including talking points explaining their position. They are urging everyone who is interested to sign it. Doug urged everyone to attend the community meetings share your likes and dislikes about each map option.

Community meetings will take place October 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and November 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>.

The Redistricting website has a lot of information.

Kristen then asked the group if there were any lingering questions that were not asked. She urged everyone to commit to going to one of the community meetings. She noted that while the Charles Barrett PTA does not have a stated position about redistricting yet, they are willing to send out a survey to collect opinions and have folks weigh in.

The following priorities were discussed:

1. Make sure the grandfathering question stays in the mix.
2. Circulate any information and updates on the listserv.
3. Reach out to your friends because we need to be reaching more families with this information. Green folders have been stuffed, robo calls have been made, but it is not enough, especially for families who are not online. Make a point to talk to other parents at drop off and pick up.
4. Ask for maps that are easier to read so people start paying attention to how they affect their family.
5. Because the process takes so long, people lose interest. Try to keep this topic front and center.
6. A key message is that we are all one community, whether we are a transfer or live in the neighborhood. Redistricting will affect your children even if you don't have to move because inevitably kids in their class will be moved. Don't disengage just because you think you won't be affected. Be a part of the discussion to keep Charles Barrett together, not just block 15.
7. Develop a cheat sheet of sorts with terms defined and maps that are easier to read and decipher.

Kristen noted that the next PTA meeting is November 7<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM in the auditorium. She then closed the meeting at 7 pm.