

Berk-P.S. - Buildings

Measure A advocate questions board plan for Cragmont

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BERK VOICE

By Michelle Latimer

A former lead proponent for 1992's Measure A, which provided the Berkeley Unified School District \$158 million for seismic retrofitting and rehabilitation of school facilities, is lobbying community groups to ask BUSD boardmembers to revisit their decision placing Cragmont School's rebuilding on the project list.

Jim Masters, who served as co-chair for the Measure A campaign, sent a letter dated Nov. 22 to the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Berkeley Association, and local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the League of Women Voters, asking for their assistance in the effort.

In the letter, Masters says that "The BUSD board has deviated from the plan that was approved"

by the voters who passed the property tax measure, which had a "green book" project list that did not include Cragmont, a Berkeley Hills school closed because of earthquake safety concerns.

The green book Masters refers to was prepared by BUSD staff and a citizens' committee, and offered a preliminary list of what projects might be funded through the measure, as well as ball-park estimates on cost.

Masters told the Voice that he didn't act sooner because he was out of town most of last summer, when the Cragmont decision was made, and because he didn't want the issue to sour voters' support for last month's vote on the Berkeley Schools Enrichment measure.

BUSD Board Director Irene Hegarty told the Voice Tuesday

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Cragmont

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that Masters' letter was written "on the premise that the green book is the bible upon which Measure A was based, and that's not true."

Hegarty said that the ballot language of the measure stated that the funding would be used to address building concerns throughout the district. "(The measure) doesn't say 'to repair schools A, B, C and D only,'" she said.

Furthermore, Hegarty contends that hill-dwellers based their "yes" votes on the measure partly on their expectation of the board's including Cragmont in the project list, which it did last July to the tune of \$9.5 million.

Masters says that the "so-called Measure A Oversight Committee ... has failed to perform its role" in the allocations process, and that the decision to fund Cragmont through it means that plans voters thought they were funding by vot-

Masters

ing "yes" on Measure A would be scaled back at most of the schools.

He called for the Chamber of Commerce to be given a seat on the board-appointed committee, which was formed several months after the measure's passage and currently consists of private individuals, building experts and labor representatives.

Milton Van Damm, Chamber of Commerce President, was out of town and unavailable for comment.

Hegarty said she does agree with Masters that the Oversight Committee has not provided as much guidance in the measure's implementation as she would have hoped, and that she would support the appointment of community group representatives to the body.

Doug Abadie, chair of the Measure A Oversight Committee, said the panel has given the board so little guidance because it wasn't given a real mission to pursue in the first place.

He said that he thought the committee was put together, at first, simply because boardmembers felt they would be "micromanaging" by taking sole responsibility for receiving the detailed and voluminous reports that were sure to come to them through the life of the project.

After the committee began receiving and studying the data and project timelines, "(Committee members) were not at all happy, because the board never made clear what they were supposed to be doing with the data," Abadie said.

He added that he hopes the board will give the committee more specific direction when it moves to appoint new members.

As for Masters' recommendation that Cragmont funding be revisited, Abadie said he would not comment on the issue specifically unless the board addressed it.

He did say, however, that "It was not my impression that the

committee was to rule on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of any project."

Masters made the point in his letter that former BUSD Superintendent LaVoneia Steele in July recommended against the unconditional rebuilding of Cragmont.

New Superintendent Jack McLaughlin implied that he would not on his own ask the board to reconsider decisions already made, but said that Masters should bring the issue before the board next Wednesday since he's hoping the board will move forward on its reconfiguration plan shortly thereafter.

Masters said he'd wait first to hear from representatives of the groups he addressed in the letter. As of Tuesday, Masters said he'd heard nothing.

Regardless, Masters said he'd "keep grinding away" at the issue, as he said he did to get passage on the measure two years ago.