



Oak Knoll School Facilities Project Questions and Answers:

Q. Why are improvements necessary at the Oak Knoll School site?

A. Oak Knoll School was built in the 1950's and currently houses 28 permanent classrooms and 14 leased portable classrooms. Originally built for an enrollment of 250 students, the current enrollment of 735 students in grades K-5 exceeds the site's permanent classroom capacity. A 2006 evaluation of Oak Knoll's facilities concluded that the school's multi-purpose room, physical education and play areas, and portable classrooms were substandard and that additional modernization of existing permanent classrooms, initially funded with the 1995 Bond, was necessary. In addition, the school's drop-off and pick-up configuration was deemed ineffective, negatively impacting traffic flow in the neighborhood and resulting in unsafe conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians.

To address these conditions and similar issues throughout the District, and to accommodate increasing enrollment, an overwhelming 70% of voters approved Measure U, a \$91 million facilities bond in June 2006.

Q. Why are the proposed new buildings located in front of the school where there is currently a grass field?

A. The Oak Knoll Design Committee, which includes the principal, teachers, parents and a neighborhood representative, considered many site design options with the project architect. After considerable public input and a comprehensive review of all options, the School Board approved the plan to place the new facilities in the front of the school in order to maximize playground and field space and best guarantee student safety. The specific benefits of this plan are:

- **Increased grass play space:**

The triangular shape of Oak Knoll's small campus, with existing buildings in the center of the site, makes it challenging to use space efficiently. Locating the new buildings in the front of the campus will result in an overall increase in grass play space for our children.

- **Significantly increased playfield space per child:**

Replacing portable classrooms with two-story buildings in the front of the school and consolidating play space in the back of the school will create one large play space rather than two small play areas. A single, large play space will provide for a broader array of activities, as well as more play space for each child, particularly if the school operates multiples recesses. The Kindergarten play area will remain in its existing location adjacent to the Kindergarten classrooms.

- **Enhanced physical education activities:**
The current field is well below State size standards. The new large field, which will include a running track, will enable P.E. Specialists to offer enhanced P.E. activities based on required curriculum standards.
- **Opportunities for organized youth/community athletics:**
There is currently a significant shortage of youth athletic field space in the community. The proposed new and larger field size will accommodate Little League baseball and youth soccer.
- **Improved playground supervision and student safety:**
First through fifth grade recess and lunch playtime activities will take place in the rear of the school with clear sight lines for optimal supervision. The children will be well-protected by high fences and buffered by classroom buildings. The dangerous consequences of students chasing balls into the street along Oak Knoll Lane will be eliminated.
- **Improved access to the new Multi-purpose Room for the school and the community:**
School operations and access for attendees at events were important considerations in the placement of the Multi-purpose Room.
- **Improved site access to the school for emergency vehicles and vehicles that transport disabled students:**
The requirements for access to the campus for emergency vehicles and disabled students were critical factors which influenced the placement of buildings.

Although the District is exempt from local building ordinances, the set-back and heights of all planned buildings are within the City of Menlo Park's requirements. In addition, all storm water run-off and drainage requirements will be met.

Q. How will the new configuration of the drop-off and parking areas improve car traffic issues in the neighborhood?

- A. The current drop-off/pick-up configuration creates inadequate circulation of cars, often causing frustrated drivers to park on neighboring streets and block access to driveways as well as pedestrian and bike paths. This creates unsafe conditions for children and adults. Designed to move more cars off the street and efficiently circulate them through the drop-off/pick-up area, the new configuration will reduce the line of cars extending into the neighborhood. The new right/left turn options from the drop-off area will allow cars to exit more efficiently onto Oak Knoll Lane, reducing traffic along Oak Avenue. A comprehensive traffic study confirms the efficiency of these improvements.

The new parking lot on Oak Avenue will provide access for vehicles transporting disabled students and on-site parking spaces for faculty and staff vehicles currently parked throughout the neighborhood. Drop-off and pick-up of other students will not be allowed in the Oak Avenue lot.

Q. What about safety for pedestrians and bicyclists?

- A. Traffic engineering firm DKS Associates evaluated the new plan to provide access to and from campus. (The City of Menlo Park also contracts with DKS Associates for the City's traffic studies and is currently using them to develop the City's Safe Routes to School Program at Encinal School.) Specific improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists will:
- Relocate the crosswalk on Oak Knoll Avenue to improve sight lines and adequately separate car traffic from pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Create a substantially wider crosswalk (15 feet) for bicyclists and pedestrians to enter and exit the campus safely
 - Create a bus bay to safely park busses out of the roadway to avoid conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Substantially increase bicycle storage capacity close to the Oak Knoll Lane crosswalk under shaded trees to encourage bicycling by both parents and students

Q. Why is the District planning to remove trees?

- A. The published plan for the project required the removal of several mature trees to provide the necessary space for new facilities and field development. Currently each affected tree is being individually evaluated to determine its health and any potential safety concerns. Every effort is being made to incorporate existing trees that have significant aesthetic and shade value into the final plans, thereby minimizing the number of trees to be removed. The Oak Knoll project landscape plan includes planting 30 - 40 trees of various sizes throughout the campus to provide shade and ensure the campus is aesthetically pleasing for years to come.

Q. Why is a new parking lot with access from Oak Avenue necessary?

- A. The District is fully committed to providing on-site parking for our 85 teachers and staff members. Oak Knoll School does not have enough on-site parking spaces to accommodate all teacher and staff vehicles, and as a result, our faculty and staff currently park on neighborhood streets. The main parking lot off Oak Knoll Lane will be reconfigured, and the current parking lot on Vine Street will be retained to provide staff parking. The new lot on Oak Avenue will provide limited supplemental parking for faculty while also providing essential access for vehicles transporting disabled students and for District service vehicles. Entry into the new parking lot will be limited to faculty/staff during school hours—with the exception of disabled students. Student drop-off/pick-up will not be permitted in the new lot. The District is actively working with the City of Menlo Park to study traffic implications and engineering options.

Q. What type of environmental review is being done at the Oak Knoll School site? What is a Negative Declaration and how is it different from a full Environmental Impact Report?

- A. The purpose of the environmental review process is to identify potential impacts to the environment from a project and, if necessary, propose solutions to mitigate or reduce those impacts where pos-

sible. The District contracted with professional environmental consultants to prepare an initial study of the Oak Knoll project in full compliance with CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) law. An extensive list of potential impacts was evaluated and the study concluded that the proposed Oak Knoll project would not result in any “significant and unavoidable impacts” to the environment. This conclusion was due, in part, to the District Reconfiguration Plan to lower Oak Knoll’s enrollment from the current 735 students to 720 regular education students over the next five years. A demographic study projected that the school would grow to nearly 790 students without the implementation of the Reconfiguration Plan.

A Negative Declaration was published and distributed to the community and the City of Menlo Park for input. Although the District’s independent CEQA consultants declared in the Negative Declaration that the project would have no significant impacts on the environment, the District is in the process of responding to community input. Some changes to the project are anticipated as a result of input from the community and the City before the Negative Declaration is adopted by the Board of Education.

With a Negative Declaration, identified mitigations to impacts are incorporated into the actual project. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared if a project is likely to result in significant and unavoidable impacts that may be impossible to mitigate. Since independent CEQA consultants determined that no significant environmental impacts were identified, in accordance with legal and industry standards, an EIR for the Oak Knoll project was not required. For other District projects (at Encinal School and at Hillview School) EIRs are required.

Q. Have the building plans for Oak Knoll been adequately reviewed by the public, including the neighboring community?

- A. During the planning process, the District actively solicited input from all constituencies regarding the project. A Site Facility Committee of Oak Knoll faculty, staff, parents and a neighborhood representative was formed to provide ideas, review concerns and guide the architect’s work. The District conducted five public hearings with large numbers of community members in attendance to review options, solicit feedback and respond to concerns. Additionally, District staff and individual Board Members attended meetings with concerned neighbors. The District directed numerous iterations to the campus layout considering all input from these meetings, as well as suggestions from community members received via e-mails and phone calls.

The District incorporated many suggestions and made accommodations wherever feasible to the size and location of buildings, parking, and access to the campus. The Board of Education has determined that the current project plan best address the neighborhood interests, the educational needs of the students and the operational needs of the school.

For more details on the Oak Knoll Facilities Project, please visit the District website:

www.mpcsd.org/facilities.html