

NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY ON THE FUTURE OF HILLSIDE SCHOOL

Background

Hillside School was designed by Walter Ratcliffe, Jr., and built in 1925. The building, with 36,000 square feet and 15 classrooms on a 2.85 acre site, is owned by the Berkeley Unified School District (not the city). It was used as a primary school until it was closed in 1983, supposedly due to declining District-wide enrollment. Since then it has been partially leased to a variety of tenants, including a day-care center, private schools, and YMCA programs. The playground has remained a community resource in active use for basketball, softball, and neighborhood play. In 1985, a proposal to build public housing on the site was rejected after vigorous neighborhood opposition—but proposals for additional public housing in Berkeley are again under consideration.

In 1989 the School District commissioned a study by Komar Associates that estimated that about two million dollars could be raised by subdividing the Hillside site for single family homes. Other uses have also been suggested. A 1991 geological study, involving trenching near the building, determined that the structure sits on a fault trace and, under the Field Act, cannot be used as a public school.

Latest Events

The School Financing Corporation has recently received a report that suggests six ways that the site could be developed—primarily for residential use. Currently, the School District is considering building a new primary school in northeast Berkeley and has commissioned further seismic studies of both Hillside and Cragmont to determine if a new structure could be built on either site. District action on Hillside is pending the outcome of these seismic studies.

Legal Factors

Hillside School is located in the Alquist-Priolo seismic zone, which means that any renovation of the building costing more than fifty percent of its value would require costly seismic upgrades and occupancy limitations. The site is zoned R-1H (hillside residential) and is both a national and city landmark, which could obstruct development plans. It is possible that the neighborhood could induce the city to preserve the existing open space for our community. In 1992 a state law was passed authorizing specialized “charter schools” within the public school system, which would be exempt from the Field Act. Nevertheless, the District could decide that the site is not suitable for even a charter school due to the fault trace. Before selling or leasing the site, the District must follow certain legal procedures, including the appointment of a “surplus site committee,” with neighborhood input, to recommend action. But the final decision rests with the School District.

Why a survey?

Following a January 1992 community meeting, concerned neighborhood residents formed “Options for Hillside,” which has investigated the possible uses of the site. Our community must have a major voice in the future of the Hillside property, and Options for Hillside is dedicated to ensuring an outcome that is in the best interests of the neighborhood. To guide our future efforts, we are seeking your response to this survey, which has been designed to assess neighborhood sentiment. We have grouped the many possible dispositions into manageable and meaningful categories—the eight options presented on page two. Inevitably, this requires considerable simplification. If you feel that the survey does not adequately permit you to express your views, we urge you to fill out the survey as best you can and to provide Options for Hillside with your additional comments verbally or in writing. You are also invited to attend our regular meetings and to become an active participant in Options for Hillside.

Please return before April 15th, so that your opinion can be counted!

THE MAIN OPTIONS

Restored school The existing site would be renovated and reopened as a public or private school. Considerations: state prohibition on public schools located on fault traces (possibly overcome by means of a charter school); identification of funding; preservation of building in community use; continued availability of open space; unknown type of school; increased traffic and parking impact.

Conversion for community use The building would be converted for such uses as meeting space, senior activities, clinics, child care, day/evening classes, etc. Considerations: ownership, maintenance, and financing; preservation of building in community use; continued availability of open space; substantial increase in circulation, traffic, and parking impact; undefined nature of public uses.

Conversion for residential use The site would be sold or leased, and the existing building would be converted into 15 to 20 mostly non-subsidized dwelling units (rental or condominium), possibly for a specialized clientele, such as seniors. Considerations: restrictive provisions of the Alquist-Priolo law; preservation of building; possible retention of some of the current open space; increased traffic and parking impact; undefined nature of tenant/owner composition.

Conversion for institutional use The site would be sold or leased to an institution that would restore and reconfigure the building for such uses as a research center, adult school, museum, library, retreat center, monastery, half-way house, etc. Considerations: restrictive provisions of the Alquist-Priolo law; preservation of building; possible retention of some of the current open space; undefined nature of user composition; loss of control over further sale/sublease; possible substantial increase in traffic and parking impact.

New school A new school would be built on the site of the current playground, while the existing building would be removed and replaced by a new playground. Considerations: geological suitability of the site; identification of funding; availability of an elementary school in northeast Berkeley; continued availability of open space for the community; increased traffic and noise; uncertain character of architectural design and of type of school.

Open space The property would be transferred to the city or some other entity, the existing building would be removed, and the entire site would be transformed into park/playground. Considerations: ownership, maintenance, and financing; availability of attractive open space to the community; restraint of development; possible need for an assessment district to collect a special neighborhood tax; possible increase of traffic and noise.

Residential development The existing building would be removed, and the site would be subdivided for construction of single-family homes. Considerations: probable loss of some community open space; no need for ongoing public maintenance or investment; limit to increase in traffic; uncertain character of architectural design.

University development The site would be sold to the University of California, the existing building would be removed, and a facility would be constructed suitable for university needs (residence hall, parking structure, etc.). Considerations: substantial increase in traffic and noise; university immunity to zoning and other ordinances; uncertain character of architectural design.

NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

Distance from Hillside School (minutes walk) _____

1. Please indicate **your opinion** about all of the following options:

	Strongly favor				Strongly oppose	
Restored school	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conversion for community use	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conversion for residential use	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conversion for institutional use	1	2	3	4	5	6
New school	1	2	3	4	5	6
Open space	1	2	3	4	5	6
Residential development	1	2	3	4	5	6
University development	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. Do you feel strongly enough about your favorite option that you would become personally and/or financially **involved in working** to make it happen?

Yes No

3. Given the practical and financial issues that have been discussed, to which of your preferred options should **Options for Hillside** devote its energy? (Please check no more than two.)

- Restored school
- Conversion for community use
- Conversion for residential use
- Conversion for institutional use
- New school
- Open space
- Residential development
- University development

4. If it became necessary to **assess a neighborhood tax** in order to achieve the following goals on the Hillside site, how much would your household be willing to pay annually?

● To **preserve open space**:

Nothing Up to \$50 Up to \$100 Up to \$250 Over \$250: _____

● To **preserve all or part of the existing building**:

Nothing Up to \$100 Up to \$250 Up to \$500 Over \$500: _____

● To **preserve both open space and the existing building**:

Nothing Up to \$150 Up to \$350 Up to \$750 Over \$750: _____

Please use the space on the reverse for your comments.

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Options for Hillside, P.O. Box 9336, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Telephone: 486-0414

Please contact me with information on how I can participate.

I enclose a donation to support our community efforts: \$ _____

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

Please add your comments and suggestions:

_____ Fold here to mail _____

Place
stamp
here

OPTIONS FOR HILLSIDE

P. O. Box 9336

Berkeley, CA 94709

THE NEIGHBORHOOD VOTES: RESTORE HILLSIDE SCHOOL!

Hillside neighbors have responded in significant numbers to the recent survey on the future of the Hillside School site, and their wishes are clear: preserve the building and its playground in service as a community asset, preferably as a restored public school. With a response rate exceeding twenty-five percent, the community has dramatized its concern about this issue and has emphasized that it intends to have a voice in the final outcome.

Of the eight options presented in the survey, "Restored school" was the clear winner. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents were favorable, and a large majority—59 percent—said that they strongly favored this outcome. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents urged Options for Hillside to devote its energy to reopening a public school, despite formidable legal and financial obstacles. Only four percent strongly opposed this option.

Two other alternatives also received major support. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were in favor of maintaining the site as community open space, with 42 percent strongly favoring this option; only ten percent were strongly opposed. Seventy-seven percent also favored conversion of the building for community use (such as meeting spaces, senior activities, day/evening classes, art

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studios, and so forth), with 27 percent strongly in favor and only eleven percent strongly opposed.

No other option received clear neighborhood support, although the notion of constructing a new

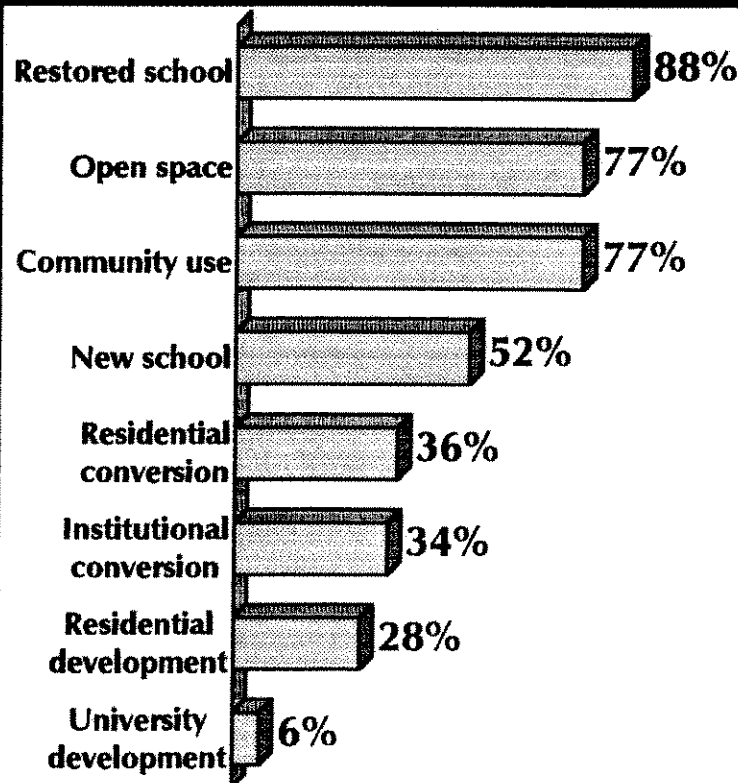
public school on the site was regarded favorably by slightly over half of the respondents, with nearly twenty percent in strong support; twenty-five percent were, however, strongly opposed.

The remaining four options were all regarded negatively. The suggestion that the building be converted into residential units was supported by only 36 percent of respondents and strongly opposed by 40 percent. Only one-third of survey-takers favored conversion of the building for institutional use (such as a research center,

adult school, monastery, and so forth), while 37 percent were strongly opposed.

The notion of subdividing the site for market-rate, single-family homes was favored by only 28

SURVEY RESULTS



Percentage of respondents strongly or moderately favorable

percent of survey-takers and was strongly opposed by 46 percent. And University development of the site was opposed by an overwhelming 94 percent, with 79 percent strongly opposed.

One other survey result is of interest: nearly half of the respondents declared themselves ready to participate personally or financially in support of their favored options—a testament to the importance of the Hillside School site to the character of the neighborhood.

Community members were also outspoken in the comments that they included with their surveys. Following is a sample of the viewpoints expressed:

“Either repeal the Field Act or find a way to get around it. We need an elementary school in this area. Children—and all the rest of us who choose to live in California—face much, much greater risks in everyday living than those posed by possible earthquakes. The present building and most of the homes in this area are seventy years old or more. They will still be here seventy years from now—unless we foolishly tear them down.”

“It should be axiomatic that open space once in the public domain should *not* revert to private use.

This is particularly true for an urban area such as Berkeley, which is starved for parks, playgrounds, and school sites. There is not one site in Berkeley that meets state standards for such entities.”

“Important considerations: (1) Amount of open space remain at least equal to the current amount of open space on the site even if the location of the open space is changed—i.e. *no reduction in the amount of open space*. (2) ‘Open space facilities’—e.g. basketball courts—very important to my children and their friends, to other children and adults both in the immediate neighborhood and from a wider area, as a place for coming together in a positive way (various ages, activities, etc.). This should be taken into account in any plans for the site—*retention of public access to open space on the site*. (3) Building itself is very special (architecturally, etc.)—all efforts be made to preserve and maintain as much of it as possible either in its current location, an altered location on the current site, or in a new location—and then find a compatible use for the structure (not necessarily a school).”

“Hillside was designed as a school and should be used for that purpose. As a school it should also be

HILLSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY: TABULATION OF RESULTS

	Preferences							Blank	Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Restored school	79	22	16	4	7	5	9	1.9	
Conversion for community use	36	31	34	9	8	14	10	2.7	
Conversion for residential use	12	13	22	11	20	52	12	4.3	
Conversion for institutional use	4	15	23	17	18	45	20	4.4	
New school	23	22	21	17	11	32	16	3.5	
Open space	56	20	28	14	4	13	7	2.5	
Residential development	14	7	16	17	18	60	10	4.5	
University development	1	1	5	5	15	100	15	5.6	

Preference range: 1 = strongly favor; 3.5 = neutral; 6 = strongly oppose

used as a community center in the evenings. No way should the City of Berkeley become involved, especially to create another tax. If Berkeley Unified School District does not want to maintain it, Options for Hillside should become a non-profit educational corporation and purchase Hillside."

"As long as the site is mainly vacant and is in public hands, it is vulnerable to perennial government schemes regarding public housing and/or homeless shelters, all the more because the City could make an 'example' of this upscale neighborhood. The best plan from the viewpoint of neighborhood character and stability (and, incidentally, property values) would be to cooperate with an intelligent private developer who would acquire the site, remove the existing building, subdivide 75% of the land for 8-10 market-rate single family homes, and then work with the neighborhood to make the remaining 25%—nearly three-quarters of an acre—into an attractive park/playground."



A PUBLIC SCHOOL WITH A CHARTER?

For Hillside to be restored as a school, there are two ways: as a public school with a charter or as a private school. Charter school legislation went into effect in January of this year. It exempts this type of public school from many Education Code requirements. Of particular interest to those wishing to see the Hillside School building restored as a school is that a charter school is exempt from the provisions of the Field Act (the law that mandates the unsuitability for public school use of structures built on fault traces).

A charter school would require the development of a petition defining the elements of the school envisioned. In order that a charter school use the Hillside School site, the Board of Education of the Berkeley Unified School District must approve the petition.

Under the auspices of Options for Hillside, a charter school group will have its first meeting on Thursday evening, June 10th.

There will be more information on charter schools and a sample charter petition for the group to consider. Please call Options for Hillside at 486-0414 for the time and place of the meeting and to let us know of your interest.

HILLSIDE—DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT

As can be easily observed, the Hillside School is deteriorating at an accelerated rate. Whether by design or bureaucratic indifference, the School District is clearly on a course that will ultimately result in the "demolition by neglect" of the Hillside structure. If allowed to continue on this course, the School District will obviously eliminate all options for community preservation and use of this grand structure.

The deteriorating condition of Hillside was recently brought to the attention of the Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission by Susan Wengraf, Planning Commissioner and Options for Hillside board member. On April 17th, School District representative Jud Owens appeared before the Landmarks Commission and reported that the School District is developing a comprehensive maintenance plan for Hillside. The Commission responded with a letter reminding the School District of a recent Governor's executive order directing state agencies to preserve, restore, and maintain heritage resources of historic or architectural significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of California. The Commission encouraged the School District to implement the Hillside maintenance plan diligently.

You can help to assure that the School District carries through in promptly developing an adequate maintenance plan and in implementing the plan by calling both the School District (644-6147) and the Landmarks Preservation Commission (644-6570) to express your concern for the preservation and maintenance of the Hillside School. We also urge you to address your comments in writing to the school superintendent, Dr. Lavoneia Steele (2134 Martin Luther King Junior Way, Berkeley 94704) and to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (2180 Milvia Street, Berkeley 94704).

MORE SEISMIC TRENCHING SCHEDULED

As most Hillside neighbors are aware, the 1991 trenching at the east end of the school site revealed a series of fault traces of the Hayward fault. This discovery rendered the building unsuitable for public school use (except by means of a charter) and led to the question before us now: what will become of the building and land?

To determine the complete extent of fault traces under the site, the School Board has authorized the trenching of the west end of the school yard. According to Arrietta Chakos, School District legislative liaison, requests for proposals from geotechnical consulting firms are expected to be issued by May 25th, and responses will be requested by June 4th. In Ms. Chakos' opinion, the trenching could begin by mid-July. It is assumed that the state will review the results immediately and will, by August 1st, issue its determination regarding the utilization of any part of the site by a regular public school.

As concerned Hillside neighbors, we urge you to write to the school superintendent, Dr. Lavoneia Steele (2134 Martin Luther King Junior Way,

Berkeley 94704), to remind her of the ruin left behind for two years following the previous trenching and to ask her to insure that the awarding of the trenching contract be dependent on the inclusion of terms requiring the "immediate repair and return to the original condition of the playground." It would not be excessive to remind Dr. Steele that the playground is in constant use both by neighborhood children and by YMCA groups.

It is anticipated that as soon as the trenching findings have been received, the School District will appoint a surplus site committee, consisting of neighbors and other interested community residents. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, the committee is formed to sit in an advisory capacity to the School District regarding use and/or disposal of apparently excess school sites. If you are interested in serving on this committee or know of persons in other parts of Berkeley who would be willing to give their time to the issue of Hillside by being a member of this committee, please call us at Options for Hillside (486-0414). The School District has indicated that they want a broad representation of the community on the surplus site committee.

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