

SUMMARY OF THE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROCESS FOR THE SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL MASTER PLAN

June 9, 2006

Background

In September 2005, Saint Mary's College High School, with the assistance of Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. (MIG), initiated a robust public involvement process to involve neighborhood members in the development of a new school master plan. The process to develop the master plan followed the resolution of contentious discussions with a small, organized group of neighbors regarding the conditional use permit and the school's use of 3,000 square feet of space. This issue was resolved by the City Council in early September 2005, and the school was advised to proceed with the development of the master plan in a manner that involved the community.

Goal for the Public Involvement Process

MIG and the school's primary goal for the public involvement process was to create opportunities for discussion and dialogue between the school and the neighbors to help inform the development of the master plan. MIG believes that this goal was successfully achieved, as evidenced by the level of community participation in the process and by the school's consistent and persistent efforts to inform and communicate with the neighbors. Neighbors could participate in a range of ways: by answering a survey, by providing comments by mail, or by participating in a series of community workshops and on-site meetings. Approximately eight to ten neighbors remained very involved throughout the process, attending most meetings and providing detailed written comments. Saint Mary's representatives and the consultant staff received and considered all comments and worked closely with the neighbors to ensure that the school fully understood specific issues and explored and considered any alternatives the neighbors suggested.

Overview of the Guiding Principles

Given the variety and complexity of the facilities proposed in the master plan, MIG recommended that Saint Mary's and the neighbors work together to develop a set of "guiding principles" that could serve as a framework for discussions. These statements helped the community articulate the desired condition they hoped could be achieved through the master plan process while giving the school flexibility in how the plan was implemented. The neighbors developed and reviewed the guiding principles, and those who did not attend the community meeting had an opportunity to provide feedback and indicate their level of agreement with the principles.

As an example, the following guiding principle helped address concerns related to potential visual impacts on the Posen Street side of the school: "Revitalize landscaping on Posen to provide a visual buffer for the gymnasium and sports fields." This statement helped to identify the concern and desired outcome while providing the school with flexibility in its selection of landscaping materials. The school later shared a detailed landscaping plan at a community meeting on May 2 and discussed the plan during an on-site meeting held on May 16. The complete list of guiding principles can be found beginning on page A-7.

Approach

MIG's approach emphasized the use of a variety of methods to solicit neighborhood feedback throughout the master plan development process. While the school was already aware of the concerns expressed by a small, organized group of neighbors, MIG felt it was imperative to involve a broad, diverse group of neighbors in the process. The Albany City Council encouraged MIG to launch the outreach process by hosting a series of community meetings to engage the neighborhood. MIG presumed that some neighbors might not attend these meetings due to a lack of time or schedule conflicts, while other neighbors—especially those with neutral or more positive views of the school—might not feel the need to attend community meetings. To ensure that all neighbors were aware of the issues and concerns being discussed and had a chance to participate in a convenient manner, MIG provided several opportunities throughout the process for neighbors to submit written comments by mail, fax, and e-mail.

Contact with Neighbors

The school kept in regular contact with neighbors by mailing materials and meeting announcements to about 300 homes and businesses surrounding the school. Materials were also posted on the school's website. The school also offered to mail hard copies of posted documents to neighbors who might not have access to the web. Neighbors were also encouraged to contact MIG or the school directly with any questions or concerns. The following summary lists the community involvement opportunities provided by Saint Mary's with assistance from MIG between October 1, 2005 and June 6, 2006. Complete summaries of these activities are available at the end of this report.

Community Involvement Opportunities: October 1 to Present

- Survey of neighbors' opinions about Saint Mary's (*October 1, 2005*)
- Community meetings/workshops
 - Meeting #1: Develop guiding principles (*October 19, 2005*)
 - Meeting #2: Refine guiding principles (*November 9, 2005*)
 - Meeting #3: Introduce conceptual master plan (*February 1, 2006*)
 - Meeting #4: Refine conceptual master plan (*May 2, 2006*)
- Issue-specific on-site meetings
 - Meeting #1: Landscaping along the Posen & Monterey property lines (*May 16, 2006*)
 - Meeting #2: Traffic circulation patterns/Codornices Creek restoration work (*May 17, 2006*)
 - Meeting #3: Sound wall along the Monterey property line (*May 18, 2006*)
 - Mail-back survey for property owners located along proposed sound wall (*June 5, 2006*)
- Written comment cards provided for use at all meetings (*ongoing*)

- Comment cards mailed to neighbors who did not attend community meetings (*ongoing*)
- Written feedback accepted by letter, fax, and e-mail (*ongoing*)
- Verbal feedback accepted by telephone in conversation with school staff and consultants (*ongoing*)
- Personal discussions with neighbors at individuals' homes or on-site on an as-requested basis (*ongoing*)

Summary of Methods

Community Survey

In early October, MIG conducted a survey to gather baseline information about neighborhood perceptions of the school. Neighbors were asked to share their perceptions of the school's impact on traffic, parking, noise, litter, and landscape maintenance. MIG distributed the survey on Saturday, October 1, 2005 between the hours of 10 am and 5 pm. Surveyors went door-to-door personally handing surveys to residents or dropping surveys off at homes with instructions to complete them before the end of the afternoon when surveyors would return to collect them. This process allowed MIG to collect a "snapshot" of neighborhood opinions as of October 1.

MIG surveyors visited 230 homes. Eighty-two (82) neighbors participated in the survey, yielding a 35 percent response rate—significantly higher than the response rate for a typical mail-back survey would have been. The survey also asked neighbors how they might prefer to participate in the process as an alternative to or in addition to community meetings. Based in part on the survey results, MIG and Saint Mary's created a variety of strategies and tools for neighborhood participation in the planning process.

Survey Highlights

- Survey respondents were most concerned about traffic impacts.
- Saint Mary's efforts to inform neighbors about scheduled events and activities were rated good to excellent by a majority of respondent.
- The school's efforts to maintain the landscaping of the campus were rated good to excellent by a majority of respondent.
- The school's efforts to manage traffic and parking and buffer surrounding properties from noise received poor to fair ratings from a majority of respondents.
- Most survey respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that St. Mary's CHS is helping to meet our community's goals to provide a quality education for high school youth."
- There was also substantial agreement with the statement: "As a neighbor of Saint Mary's, I accept that I will periodically be impacted by school activities."

In general MIG learned that the issues that concerned neighbors most were, in rank order: traffic, parking, noise, and litter. The survey also revealed a high level of awareness of the school's efforts to develop a master plan, and most neighbors accepted that they might be affected by school activities from time to time.

Community Meetings

Saint Mary's College High School hosted four community meetings between October 2005 and May 2006. The meetings were facilitated and recorded by MIG. They included informational presentations by school officials and consultants and numerous opportunities for discussion and comment. MIG also worked with the school and the community to identify and implement additional strategies to improve communications between the neighborhood and the school and provide opportunities for neighbors to share their ideas and concerns about the master plan process.

Meeting #1: October 19, 2005

The first community meeting was held on October 19, 2005 from 7 to 9 pm. Approximately 35 people attended the meeting including 24 community members and about 10 representatives from Saint Mary's, including staff and members of the school's master plan committee. The councilmember from District 5 in Berkeley and the Community Development Director for the City of Albany also attended.

The purpose of the first community meeting was to:

- introduce the community to the proposed master plan process;
- share the results of the "snapshot" survey conducted on October 1st; and
- engage participants in a group exercise to develop guiding principles for the master plan.

A key product of this meeting was to collect input that would assist with the development of series of statements called "guiding principles". The statements would provide the school the flexibility it needed to consider a variety of options and alternatives while providing direction on how the school could remain responsive to community concerns.

Meeting #2: November 9, 2005

The second community workshop was held on Wednesday, November 9, 2005 from 7 to 9 pm. As with the October meeting, the school publicized the community meeting to approximately 300 neighboring households and merchants. About 21 community members attended plus 12 school representatives. The councilmember from District 5 in Berkeley and the Community Development Director for the City of Albany also attended. Those not attending the meeting were sent a comment card by mail so they could provide feedback.

The purpose of the second community meeting was to:

- review the draft guiding principles; and
- collect community feedback on these principles.

Community members reviewed the draft guiding principles and provided their opinion on whether they agreed, disagreed or agreed with modification to the guiding principles. These statements would serve as a foundation for the master plan and emphasize the desired outcome in the community without limiting the school's alternatives for achieving these desired conditions. It was agreed that some of the statements addressed ongoing operational activities and some were specific to the design and implementation of the master plan. The architect and master plan emphasized those principles that were most applicable to the master plan and could be addressed through thoughtful planning, design and construction.

Meeting #3: February 1, 2006

As with earlier meetings, the school sent a letter publicizing the meeting to approximately 300 neighboring addresses prior to each community meeting. Approximately 29 people attended the community meeting on February 1. Participants included 20 community members, 3 city representatives, 5 representatives from Saint Mary's and the restoration coordinator from the Urban Creeks Council. The purpose of the third community meeting was to:

- provide an overview of the educational program needs of Saint Mary's;
- review the draft conceptual master plan; and
- allow participants to share comments and concerns.

The third community meeting featured a presentation and questions and answers with the architect on the draft conceptual master plan. The community was able to identify and discuss key issues, including: increased use of sports fields, tree removal, potential creek run-off and drainage issues, chapel usage and rental by outside groups, length of the construction process and other concerns. The also suggested alternatives for consideration by the architect and master plan committee.

Meeting #4: May 2, 2006

Again, the school sent a letter publicizing the meeting to approximately 300 neighboring addresses prior to each community meeting. About thirty people attended the meeting including: nineteen neighbors, the Mayor of Albany, the City of Albany Planning Director and the Director of Community Development, Berkeley Councilmember Laurie Capitelli and ten representatives from Saint Mary's.

The purpose of the fourth community meeting was to:

- inform neighbors of Saint Mary's progress on the master plan;
- provide more in-depth presentations on priority activities in the master plan
- provide opportunities for comment and discussion

A detailed presentation on the proposed track and field complex renovation and landscaping was presented. This project is a high priority for the school given the poor condition of the track and fields. The landscape architect provided a detailed explanation of the proposed renovations and the landscaping that would be planted (in response to neighbor concerns) to screen the fields. There was also a detailed presentation by the Urban Creeks Council (UCC) about proposed restoration activities in the Creek, including UCC's education and stewardship activities involving Saint Mary's students. The school is working closely with UCC to ensure the creek restoration is successful and that other activities proposed in the master plan minimize impacts on the creek.

Issue-Specific Small Group Meetings

These meetings were intended to be informal, on-site discussions. At each meeting, a brief description of the proposed master plan activity was described and questions were taken throughout. A written comment card was provided to all who attended so they could provide additional feedback after the meetings.

Meeting #1: Posen site (May 16, 2006)

Nine people from eight households attended this informal meeting to discuss the proposed track and field restoration, Posen side landscaping and replacement bleachers. The landscaping was requested by the neighbors to help better screen the fields.

Meeting #2: Albina site (May 17, 2006)

Eleven neighbors from ten households attended this informal meeting on creek restoration and traffic patterns on all sides of the campus. A representative from the Urban Creeks Council took participants on a walking tour of the creek and described the proposed restoration activities, which include removing several hazardous eucalyptus trees. After the creek discussion, the architect described some alternative circulation patterns, including a potential access from Monterey. This was proposed to help better distribute traffic among the different school entrances.

Meeting #3: Monterey site (May 18, 2006)

Nine neighbors from seven households attended this informal meeting to learn more about the construction of a sound wall along the Monterey property line. Specifically, neighbors from six of the eighteen properties along Monterey and Posen that would be affected by the wall attended the meeting, and the owner of a seventh property was consulted before the meeting. The school also installed “story poles” that would help the neighbors better visual how the wall might impact their property. The school will keep the poles in place should future questions or other neighbors want more information. As of this report, no neighbors had contacted the school for additional information.

Mail-back survey for neighbors located along proposed sound wall

Following the on-site meeting, at the request of the neighbors, MIG prepared a survey that was mailed to 20 property owners along Monterey and the corner of Monterey and Posen that would be most immediately impacted by the sound wall. Also as requested, the neighbors were given a chance to review and comment on the survey before it was sent. A copy of the survey is included in the appendix. A response was requested by June 5, 2006.

Sound Wall Survey Results

Fifteen of the twenty property owners responded. Nine respondents were property owners who would be directly impacted by the construction of the sound wall along their property line. Four of these property owners were in support of the wall, four were not in support of the wall, and one requested additional information. Six respondents lived near the proposed wall, but the wall would not be on their property line. Of these six property owners, three supported the wall, two did not, and one needed more information.

For the sound wall to achieve results, it must be continuous to achieve results. Given that 4 property owners in key locations do not support the wall or want to school to pursue this alternative any further, it would not be a good use of school funds to undertake the additional acoustic and engineering studies.

Given potential high cost of the wall, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a cost-share with Saint Mary’s. Three respondents indicated they would be willing to participate in a cost share with the school. Five property owners responded “possibly, depending on the cost” and seven indicated they were not interested in participating in a cost share with the school.