

01/05/2016

Hello. I am Joan Gass, Scripps Ranch resident since 1973, education representative for the original Scripps Ranch community plan, member and chairman of the San Diego Unified School District Facilities Planning Committee in the 1980s, and retired faculty member at Scripps Ranch High School. I have been concerned about the educational needs of Scripps Ranch students for more than 40 years and would like to speak with you about my concerns regarding the Spring Canyon site.

School sites are acquired and paid for by San Diego taxpayers and through Mello Roos funds in order to meet the educational needs of the community. They are not acquired to provide income for the school district. Since the passage of Prop. 13 in the 1970s, local school districts have lost direct control of funding and have become desperate to find sources to fund education. Alas, that has meant that districts have established facilities divisions to seek out possible pieces of real estate that might generate income. This is bad planning and can lead to devastating results. Both as a volunteer and as an employee, I have watched as the district has made or attempted to make bad decisions regarding facilities and land. But, do not despair: action on the part of citizens has resulted in some very important victories for the students of San Diego.

Let me note quickly at least two examples where the district proposals to generate income from property have failed. In the 1980s, the district decided to attempt to negotiate a long term lease of the Dana Jr. High property in Point Loma so that a developer could build a large condo project. The SDUSD Facility Utilization Committee opposed this plan. A San Diego Grand Jury met and criticized the district's efforts. I am happy to say that no condos were build on the site and that, instead, it has continued to be used as classrooms and offices to serve the needs of students.

Second, from the inception of planning for Scripps Ranch High School, the district envisioned that part of the property could belong-term leased to businesses. Scripps Ranch Blvd was laid out to divide the property, and approximately \$300,000 was spent in creating glossy brochures and other advertising material in an attempt to lease a part of the property. Just as today, the Facilities Planning Manager argued that there was no need for the school district to set aside the entire property for a school site. She cited new numbers that appeared to show a projected decrease in high school enrollment. And, just as today, residents opposed the district with clear arguments as to the necessity to keep school property for school use. The school district retracted its position, and Scripps Ranch High School is using the vast majority of the entire parcel for educational needs such as a building for engineering classes and to house permanent classrooms for all English and history classes.

Today, similar actions can yield similar results on the Spring Canyon site. Hear me clearly: SDUSD cannot state with certainty that there could not be an educational use for this property over the lifetime of the proposed lease. Here's a possible use of the property: SDUSD, in its study entitled Caught in the Middle, argued for small middle schools to serve the social,

emotional, and educational needs of middle school students. The Spring Canyon site could be configured to reduce the enrollment in Marshall Middle School. Also, SDUSD is offering more and more charter school choices in an effort to both meet the needs of its students and to retain students whose needs are not met in traditional class settings. The Spring Canyon site already houses a charter school, thus answering the academic needs of several hundred district students.

On a positive note, SDUSD has found creative and imaginative responses to the proper educational use of school property by implementing shared use of sites by charter and traditional schools. But note well, shared use does not mean allocating less than 2% of a parcel for educational use. It means assessing all present and possible future educational needs for school district property. It means being a visionary educational leader, rather than becoming a property management agency. Good stewards of assets manage the assets; they do not give them away to the only bidder; they do not look to simple and questionable financial solutions while overlooking the myriad possibilities to provide a 21st century quality education for the students they were elected to represent; they do not call for a communitywide brainstorming session just to ignore valuable suggestions made by the community; they do not take Mello Roos fees and general fund tax dollars to favor the interests of a developer over the needs of children.

My 40 years of efforts on behalf of San Diego school children leads me to believe that people of good will, whether they be San Diego citizens or the San Diego Unified School District School Board and its employees can work together for an outcome that our children deserve.

Thank you.