



The Environmental Charter School at Frick Park
Regent Square Community Meeting
January 13, 2010

Notes from Questions/ Answer portion:

(bold typeface indicates questions and comments from the community)

The below represents a capture of the discussions to the best of the ability of Rothschild Doyno Collaborative. Please forward any comments or revisions to geoffc@rdcollab.com

There have been traffic incidents in the past with little legislative reaction. The school can help, reduced speed limits, there are residents who are in favor of the school.

Regarding the conditional use permit application process: the community and school didn't communicate well;

Tonight is meant as a means to start-over with a clean slate.

If traffic is going to double; can you use the bus drop-off area as car drop-off area as well?

Use LaClair and Milton!

Use more bikes in the school!

Is there potential to reuse nature center at other end of Frick Park?

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy member: the nature center is not suitable for a school; the building is falling apart, but would like to grow there (footprint small). Would like to offer kids similar experiences

Perceived car behavior vs. actual: just because 25 mph is posted, traffic doesn't really drive at 25 mph. Busses are not a fast process – Dangerous. People pull out at intersections which causes a back-up. (Braddock as path to Children's Hospital). While the intent of the school is to have its parents do a one-way loop, there will still be traffic both ways.

Busses currently park south of Henrietta.

We weren't aware of that, they may not be ours. We will look into it.

The park is an asset for the school AND the community; this appears to be a conflict. Some community members use the park during weekdays.

Only 6% currently walk; its should be higher.

The school doesn't directly serve the Regent Square community.

Where will addition be?

Addition will be built behind on asphalt: school will add a multi-purpose room on the top floor to act, in part, as playground.

People park on LaClair currently.

Residents from neighborhood don't have priority to get into ECS; its not a neighborhood school.

Busses aren't environmentally friendly. Kids come from all over. Families leave Regent Square because they want to get access to better schools.

Construction impact appears as if it will be great.

Both sides of Braddock are impacted by the school– 4 distinct districts.

We are currently informed by our charter, there is a great deal of need for the school. This process to expand and allow more students.

Busses are currently idling 30 minutes.

This is contrary to our policy, and we will continue to enforce it.

We (Regent Square) would like to be more representative of the area.

We want to provide a good benefit to others.

Can the charter be amended to include additional preference to area around school?

We would have to go in front of school board.

Can this be provided by PPS?

Audience member: No: its PA charter law, but attorneys are pushing the issue.

Can you clarify the % of students by district?

60% Pittsburgh: will grow because Pittsburgh has preference over other districts. Second largest representation is Woodland Hills.

Problem as neighbors: a new era of cooperation after a bad start.

We trust the current leadership of ECS, but the community needs legal protection (in case leadership of the school changes)

There have been rumors of acquisition along Braddock Ave: Is this it, or will there be more growth?

600 would fulfill the charter. Acquisition was another option, instead of building behind the school.

This could be a legal condition.

Milton residents appreciate the schools efforts on traffic – LaClair does not.

First year traffic was chaotic, but it got better after efforts.

There is a concern that it would take extraordinary effort to maintain traffic with additional students.

There should be staff accountable to neighborhood. This affords the community a voice and power.

Legal protections help the community.

The relationship between the community and school is also an investment on the school's behalf.

What is the length of time for the construction?

Where would the truck traffic be?

What happens to the South Braddock trail?

Has parking in the basement of the building been considered?

Suggest a traffic light at Henrietta or Biddle at Braddock; none holds to the 25 mph limit.

Construction will cause some issues, but we will attempt to limit it: designate our deliveries and traffic in groups. Storage will be off site. Traffic and parking will be tightly controlled. We will cause minimal disruption as possible. Construction will also need to respect the operation of the school, with regards to noise and traffic.

Construction will be 9-11 months, and will have to be ready for the school year, so the end date won't change.

We investigated underground parking, but there isn't enough depth under the building, as we need to need to match floors of the existing building.

Other nearby schools have not always engaged the community.

Historically, there were neighborhood schools here, but they were not diverse. There have been traffic issues in the past. Nobody has a designated space on a public street.

PPS magnet schools also have a lottery system. Diversity of ECS is an asset to the neighborhood.

Parents desire the school to have a good relationship with the community. Kids in the school see Regent Square as their neighborhood as well.

People support the mission of the school, but from an outside view: the school doesn't have the space or resources to grow.

Can't just spread people around: you are expanding at the expense of the neighborhood.

What are the financial commitments that the school is making in regards to parking?

Parking has to be part of the plan. If the funding isn't there, maybe the timings not right.

Parking solutions are not a result of cost, we are paying for offsite lots and current traffic guard and management. The parking solution is because we don't want to build more asphalt in a residential neighborhood. If even we did, there isn't a place to put it. This has been typical of urban environments. The intent is to use parking that exists, without detriment.

Can you look at expansion of the Biddle lot?

Audience member: expansion is a detriment, and not at all likely to happen with Pittsburgh Parks.

Doubling is more than the neighborhood can handle.

ECS should be happy with where you are; be happy with the way you are now.

What happens if you don't expand, and you don't fulfill your charter? What's wrong with small class size?

If we don't grow in accordance with the charter, we could be found to be operating inconsistently with it and perhaps have problems with our authorizer. We also want to grow to be able to meet the needs of children who can't get a spot in the school but want to.

If you can't expand here, what happens?

We would look at alternatives. We are attempting to meet a need that is site specific.

Will you potentially move?

We don't know, we are yet to find a good alternative location that would serve the mission of the school.

What about doing K-8 in the existing building?

K-8 in the existing building would mean cutting classes from three to one and serving even fewer children than currently

Did PPS give a charter for K-8 in a building that couldn't accommodate it?

Yes, knowing that there would need to expansion at some point; this is part of the public record.

As a member of community: we weren't aware of that.

We would like to expand here for the reasons in the presentation. We are looking for other opportunities, but are yet to find them.

Do you have a hard copy available?

We will email a pdf to www.rsca.org, including these questions and answers.

During approval, is it just for the architectural part, or the "whole package?"

It's the whole package.

The building fits with little impact. The traffic and parking is something we are bringing to you.

RSCA Grand plan: what is the status, and does it intersect with this expansion?

RSCA: It is still in the picture, but overlaps of 4 municipalities is a significant challenge. For example, it took 6 months to get logo approvals.

What's the best way for residents to keep our finger on the pulse?

We will connect with you via the information from sign-in sheet, as well as through the RSCA.

Questions on the governmental process can be answered by Jason Kambitsis of PGH City Planning & Councilman Shields's office

The students are willing to go through the process, please don't ignore that.

Regent Square is not a racist neighborhood.

Regent Square does want diversity, just not the impact of numbers.

The infrastructure of Regent Square (brick roads) can be impacted by construction traffic.

Is the addition higher than the existing building?

Slightly – we will draw and share sections and heights at the next meeting.

There was a desire expressed for a high school in the past. Can the conditions of a conditional use apply to another structure?

Imagine schools typically tries to place three K-8 in a larger area (eg. Hazelwood, Penn Hills) to support a high school. There is no intent to have a high school in Regent Square.

Any expansion would be considered like a new building (through the zoning process).

Pittsburgh Public Schools has closed a number of elementary schools, and is trying to sell them, but won't sell them to charter schools.

PPS currently permits 6 charter schools.

School taxes maintain public schools.

Does Pittsburgh have any green laws in construction?

Audience member: there currently are none in the PGH zoning code.

Money for ECS does come out of the PPS school district, on a per student basis. Is Imagine Schools a non-profit, or are they profiting off of this?

Imagine is currently a for profit entity, but they are operating as, and have applied for, non-profit status.

There are a lot of people who use the Biddle lot. School originally accomodated K-8, 230 students. At that time it fit quaintly; wasn't disturbing in its use of resources.

Expansion will bring on more noise and traffic.

Has anyone investigated the reuse of the former Center for Creative Play building?

It is outside the city limits. Woodland Hills has turned down two charter schools in that space.

Concern that the word did not get out to the greater Regent Square community.

Need to look into a mass mailing, e-blast.

Why is there no stop sign at the end of Milton? Why is there no school zone? There was discussion of it being handled in June.

PGH has always had a bias to moving traffic over pedestrian safety. Putting up traffic controls is a difficult process in PGH.

The board has approved the start of the process to include a traffic zone, which would include Braddock and Henrietta. The school is anxious to talk about any reduction in speed.