



City of El Cerrito and West Contra Costa Unified School District  
Korematsu Middle School /Castro Park Community Meeting

**Meeting Summary**

*September 22, 2015, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.*

*City Hall, City Council Chambers*

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Prepared by:



October 19, 2015

## I. Introduction

On September 22, 2015 the City of El Cerrito and West Contra Costa Unified School District convened a community meeting to provide information and project updates regarding the status of Korematsu Middle School and Castro Park, as well as receive community feedback. Approximately 50 community members were in attendance. The meeting included a presentation by representatives from the City, West Contra Costa Unified School District and architectural design team, and AC Transit.

Presenters included:

- Yvetteh Ortiz, City of El Cerrito Public Works Director / City Engineer,
- Luis Freese, District Engineering Officer,
- Matthew Burnham, Korematsu Principal,
- Marcus Hibser, Hibser Yamuchi Architects, Inc,
- Christopher Jones, City of El Cerrito Recreation Director,
- Sean Diest Lorgion, Senior Transportation Planner, AC Transit, and
- Representatives from the El Cerrito Police Department who responded to questions.

The meeting facilitator, Joan Chaplick, MIG, Inc. opened the meeting by welcoming participants and introducing the meeting agenda and opportunities for community input and questions. Ms. Ortiz and Mr. Freese provided brief background on the project and introduced the speakers. Principal Burnham presented an overview of the school's mission, the student demographics, and on-site safety resources. He also described planned programs and strategies to help make the transition to the new campus go smoothly for the students, parents and neighbors. Mr. Hibser presented an update on the construction of Korematsu, including site plans and photos of the buildings in construction, as well as the plans for parking and student pick-up/drop-off and campus safety and access to school amenities. Principal Burnham and Mr. Jones explained Castro Park's joint-use agreement between the District and the City. Ms. Ortiz presented about traffic, pedestrian and bicycle improvements near Korematsu. Mr. Diest Lorgion provided background on AC Transit's approach to school services. He also presented proposed new bus routes to respond to Korematsu student needs and the required process, timelines and next steps for changing the routes.

The presentation is available online at: <http://el-cerrito.org/index.aspx?nid=933>.

## II. Public Discussion

Community members provided comments and asked questions related to transportation and parking, the school's building design and relationship to the neighborhood, after-hour programs and activities on campus, and shared usage of Castro Park. Comments and questions are summarized below and organized by topic. They also include potential strategies and solutions offered by the participants.

### A. TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

#### Student Drop-off and Pick-ups

- Community members expressed concerns about traffic, congestion and safety around school drop-off and pick-up locations.
- Participants asked questions about whether car drop-offs will share space with the AC Transit bus stop. City and District representatives indicated there will be separate zones for buses and cars. The bus zone will be on Donal while car zones are planned on Donal and Lawrence. Based on participant suggestions, the City and District will also look into providing a car zone on Norvell.
- Some participants suggested providing training for parents on how and where to drop-off and pick-up their children. An efficient and safe traffic flow during drop-off and pick-up needs to be modeled starting the first day of school.
- Meeting participants emphasized that drop-off and pick-up locations should be monitored to ensure students and parents follow suggested procedures.
- A community member suggested staggered start times to help reduce the impact of drop-off/pick-up on neighborhood traffic.
- One participant asked about an ADA accessible drop-off location and noted that there are no curb-cuts at Lawrence St. and Gladys Ave.

#### AC Transit Routes and Stops

- Community members had questions and provided feedback regarding the revised AC Transit routes and bus stop locations presented by Mr. Diest Lorgion.
- There were some concerns that the proposed revised AC Transit routes, buses would need to use narrow streets and require turns at busy intersections.
- Idling buses were mentioned as a concern. Mr. Diest Lorgion indicated that buses should not be idling and that the public could contact AC Transit if this were observed.

- Several participants provided specific suggestions for alternate routes. Mr. Diest Lorgion recorded the suggestions and said that they would be considered as AC Transit proceeds with the formal process for modifying the routes.
- Meeting participants voiced concern over the safety of the students who will need to walk from neighborhood bus stops before the new routing is established. Mr. Diest Lorgion noted that AC Transit will work with the community to identify some interim strategies to address safety.

## Bicycle and Pedestrian Concerns

- Community members showed strong support for improved bike route connections to Korematsu Middle School and Safe Routes to Schools. There were several parents of Korematsu students in attendance and some volunteered to spearhead a bicycle club at Korematsu and to help develop a Safe Routes to School program.
- Ms. Ortiz indicated the City was developing a Citywide Active Transportation Plan and Safe Routes to School evaluation for Korematsu to plan for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, both short-term and long-term.
- Community members also expressed the need for specific safe bicycle and pedestrian route connections, including improved connections from Korematsu to: Kensington, the Ohlone Greenway, and the Richmond Greenway.
- Community members identified several considerations for a Safe Route to School program including:
  - evaluating whether bike lanes or bike boulevards are safer for students
  - providing secure bike parking at Korematsu
  - considering the entire geographic area in which students are traveling
- A participant commented that there is currently significant traffic on Navellier St. related to student drop-off and pick-ups at Prospect School, El Cerrito High and Portola Middle School and suggested speed bumps be installed to help address the issue.
- Another participant expressed that cars parked long-term on city streets contribute to traffic congestion and suggested that street cleaning might encourage more movement of parked cars and improved traffic flow.
- A participant suggested providing crossing guards as a strategy for creating safer pedestrian conditions, especially at busy and uncontrolled intersections. There was also a question about whether civilian/volunteer crossing guards were an appropriate solution and one allowed by District policies.
- Participants highlighted several intersections and streets as areas of concern including:
  - Gladys Ave.
  - Richmond St. at Donal Ave.
  - Richmond St. at Gladys Ave.
  - Portola Ave. and Navellier St.

- Potrero Ave. and Navellier St.
- Cutting Blvd at Wilson Way

## **B. SCHOOL BUILDING AND CAMPUS**

### **Building Design**

Meeting participants asked questions about how the school will interface with the community.

- One participant was concerned about the school's bells sounding during weekends and holidays and the frequency of outdoor announcements.
- Participants asked about adequate lighting for safety and highlighted the need for lighting near the multipurpose room.
- The location and height of the school's heating and cooling systems was mentioned as an area of concern because the location of these systems on the school's roof could impact neighbors' views.
- A participant asked about the use of the multipurpose room and how many people it seats.
- A community member asked about the intended use of the amphitheatre.

### **School Events and Student Activities**

- Community members expressed concerns about a range of issues related to school events and after-school programs including:
  - traffic and parking impact
  - students leaving campus unsupervised
  - potential sound from events
- A meeting participant asked about police presence in and around the school campus.
- Principal Burnham and City police officers assured community members that students are supervised and school staff and police enforce the school's closed-campus policy. Students who are off campus and unattended will be assisted in getting to where they are supposed to be, whether that is home or school.
- Principal Burnham and police officers encouraged neighbors to contact them if they observe students off campus during school hours. The non-emergency police number is 510-233-1214, option 2. Principal Burnham can be reached at 510- 231-1449. He is available after school hours and will respond to any students loitering after hours.
- A community member asked if neighbors will receive notice of after school events.

- A PTSA representative at the meeting announced that the PTSA will be a liaison between the community and the school for school events. For example, neighbors will be notified of and invited to attend band concerts.
- One community member was concerned about trash control and requested garbage cans be installed on Richmond St. or close to bus stops.

### Other Topics

- Community members asked about the projected growth of the Korematsu student population. Principal Burnham responded that the school is only designed to accommodate the current number of students so no growth is anticipated.
- A meeting participant asked whether the school is designated as an emergency shelter and, if so, it would be good to provide neighbors with that information.
- A meeting participant thanked the School District and City for being responsive to the community's concerns. The project updates presented at the meeting demonstrated that neighbors' input and suggestions have been considered and incorporated.

### C. CASTRO PARK AND THE JOINT USE AGREEMENT

- Community members expressed their concerns and questions regarding Korematsu's use of Castro Park.
- There were questions about public access to park facilities such as tennis and basketball courts. Participants also asked about access from the school to the park.
  - There will be no change in access to the tennis courts; Korematsu Middle School does not intend to use them. The basketball courts will be open to the public after school, on non-school days, and during the weekends. The school campus will have a gate that opens directly on to the Castro Field for student access only during scheduled classes.
- Several community members stressed that public access to these facilities is important.
- There were questions about the details of the joint-use agreement between the City of El Cerrito and the School District, including:
  - Which entity is responsible for park maintenance?
    - The City is responsible for the maintenance of the play field, playground, and tennis courts.
  - How were the upgrades to the baseball fields funded?
    - WCCUSD provided \$250,000 for the renovation of the play field
  - Is there adequate field space for all park users?

- Currently two PE classes use Cerrito Vista play field. When students move to the new Korematsu campus, only one class will use the field at a time due to the availability of a gym.
- A community member commented that tall, well-established trees were removed during the construction of the school and suggested that they should be replaced with large trees in order to help provide wildlife habitat and restore the tree canopy in the neighborhood.