



GRASSROOTS  
COMMUNITY  
ADVOCATES

June 5, 2019

Re: Head-Royce Proposed Master Plan

Dear Head-Royce School Trustees, and Alumni Council Members:

Please accept our thanks to Crystal Land and Peter Smith for the informative meeting Head-Royce School (HRS) hosted for the community on May 7, 2019. It provided neighbors the opportunity to again be counted among supporters of education in Oakland, whether public or private.

The NSC last wrote to your Board of Trustees in March 2019. In response, HRS posted Myths vs. Facts on the school's website. [Please find attached the NSC response to this posting with additional comments.](#)

When NSC expressed concern because HRS had not submitted any expert studies to the City with its Master Plan application, we explained to the HRS Trustees that developers provide the City with these studies because they demonstrate that during the planning of the project, experts were involved and that potential negative impacts were considered and/or mitigated.

Since we expressed this concern about the lack of expert studies, HRS has vacillated about why no geotechnical, hydrology, arborist, traffic engineer, or acoustics studies accompanied its Master Plan application filed with the city in December 2018. HRS has vaguely claimed that experts were involved and worked on the plan or, HRS contends that the City's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will do all the studies and then the neighbors will see the studies during a limited 45-day comment period.

An EIR will not replace the work that should have been done by experts *while* HRS designed the master plan. An EIR evaluates the project as designed only for environmental impacts, not for design of operational impacts affecting students, parents, and neighbors, or for impacts on homeowners and renters entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their residences. Therefore, the idea that an EIR is a substitute for expert studies *during the formation of a plan* is not credible.

HRS now has a plan with easily discernable negative impacts on the neighborhood and the school community, which NSC previously described in its last correspondence to you. HRS apparently still has no traffic engineering study that supports its guesstimates concerning its traffic design. Neighbors are also somewhat incredulous that HRS seems to assume that eight-foot sound walls a few feet from house property lines and vegetation will stop noise from the perimeter road.

These planning failures are a poor reflection on the board and on HRS. It appears the board chose to leave the project to two attorney trustees, rather than taking an active part in mitigating the plan's obvious impacts. Listed by HRS on its website is a trustee who might have been helpful, but she is not even in California. Rachel Flynn was the City of Oakland Planning Director some years ago and at that time, pointed out to neighbors and HRS that the school was "overwhelming the public infrastructure around the school." She later left the city, joined the HRS board, took a job out of Oakland, and currently works in a city administration office for Fairfax, Virginia. It is not credible that she is an active, hands-on board member. How many more members are not attending regular board meetings, asking the critical questions, and taking control, rather than leaving everything to Mr. Verges and Mr. Smith?

The HRS board also appears to be in constant growth mode without any obvious connection to educating children in the typical small-sized private school setting. Just since 2006, HRS has gone from 700 students to acquiring a permit for 906 students. HRS has not even obtained the permit for the 1,250 students, and appears already working on your next expansion by continuing to accumulate real estate bordering the school. Two months ago, your board bought another house on Whittle. That pattern is consistent with "land-banking" to eventually replace housing with school and non-school operational uses such as an entertainment venue.

Despite consistent communication about how important HRS considers safety for children, the board does not appear to adequately fund or require safety measures as a priority. HRS agrees with the neighbors that there is an erosion problem on the hillside above the North Campus parking lot and that all of the eucalyptus trees need to be removed as they are a fire hazard. Yet, the board apparently is unwilling to fund immediately stabilizing the hillside above the parking lot, removing all eucalyptus trees, and staffing adequate landscape services for vegetation management.

Sincerely,

Karen Carona

On behalf of NSC

cc: Rebecca Lind  
Bill Gilchrist  
Oakland City Council  
Oakland Mayor  
Planning Commission  
City Administrator