

## **RVMAC Attends Ukiah Meeting on Sale or Lease of Vacant Redwood Valley School**

The Ukiah Unified School District (UUSD) has formed a “District Advisory 7-11 Committee” to make recommendations as to the disposition of the Redwood Valley (RV) Elementary School on School Way in RV. After meetings earlier this year, the Committee contacted members of the Redwood Valley Municipal Advisory Council (RVMAC) to invite its attendance at “7-11 Committee” meetings as of April 18, 2017. RVMAC members Chris Boyd (Chair), Cassie Taaning (Secretary), and Marybeth Kelly (Alternate) attended the 5 pm meeting. Because notice of the meeting came AFTER the RVMAC’s meeting on April 12, no RVMAC position or opinions could be given, but attendees could express their own personal views, and ask questions on behalf of Redwood Valley residents. At least 2 members of the 7-11 Committee are RV residents (Zak Schat and Guy Mills). In addition, Dr. Marvin Trotter, another RV resident, also attended and provided input about the need for a community center in RV with activities directed toward young people of the community

After welcoming RVMAC members and inviting their input, 7-11 Chair, Ray Chadwick (retired UUSD Superintendent) explained that the purpose of the 7-11 Committee is to ADVISE the UUSD Board about the various options for the future of the RV School and a vacant middle school in Hopland. The committee has 10 members representing different constituencies (most are from the school district) who are assessing the issue from multiple perspectives, and propose to make recommendations to the Board by June or soon after. Their next meeting (a public, Brown Act meeting) will be on May 17 at 5 pm at the UUSD location on Orchard in Ukiah

Both the RV and Hopland vacant schools are a financial drain on the UUSD, at a time when the district has an \$9 million unfunded schedule of major maintenance needed on its existing school structures (roofs being one of the biggest items). Further, according to State criteria under which the district operates, the system can accommodate 699 additional students before it reaches capacity in its existing buildings. The vacant schools incur not just ongoing maintenance costs (mowing, running utilities, repairing vandalism, etc.), but also costs in depreciating values as the buildings remain vacant and sustain wear over time. It’s imperative that the UUSD move to derive greater value from the sites, either by sale or lease. Consideration was also given to reopening one or both, but little opportunity for significantly increased enrollment appears ahead: perhaps 121 homes will be built in the Lover’s Lane proposed development, but estimates project only an additional 43 students to the district should that proceed. Steve Dunnecliff (County) and Sage Sangiacomo (City of Ukiah) explained that population growth in Mendocino County remains static, and housing development remains challenging for the private sector without more community jobs. Therefore, the need to reopen the schools in the near future appears unlikely.

7-11 members reviewed various costs/benefits of keeping the schools unoccupied; of leasing the facilities; and sale of the facilities. All options have many advantages, disadvantages, and many complexities. Some factors affecting the discussion include:

- Lease income goes into General Fund (usable for many purposes)
- Sale revenue goes into the capital improvement fund only (for real estate improvements), and can't be used for general purposes
- Each vacant school will require one-time start up costs ranging from \$1.34-1.56 million for Hopland, and more for RV. The latter would require upgrades to the current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards that were never required before, due to its closure. Examples: the athletic field is at a lower level, adding to a real challenge for ADA ramps/access. RV is also on septic, and lack of use could require considerable reworking. The Hopland school was redone after floods shortly before closure, but that flood demonstrates that the site is not optimum, just as the hillside location of RV is a disadvantage. Both schools would also require upgrades for automation.
- While lease income would be beneficial, it would also incur ongoing costs even while keeping the buildings at least functioning. However, occupants could quit the buildings even if leased for a long term, requiring finding another appropriate lessee.
- If property is sold, neither UUSD nor local community retains assurance that the new use(s) would be in the community's interest. Leasing would retain some control and might better enable community input.

How the Redwood Valley community would view the sale or lease of the site is an important issue. Its use as a community center could be ideal. Marvin Trotter commented on the excellent model created in Iceland beginning in the 1990s, when the nation shifted priorities to creating effective after school activity programs for children and youth in order to combat rising alcohol, drug, and other problems. The programs have been enormously successful and show the way for communities such as ours to provide more positive activities and outcomes for our kids. He strongly advocates for turning the RV School into a viable community center. Cassie Taaning pointed out that the original deed creating the RV School may contain provisions that only allow its future use for education; the UUSD attorney will research the deed. Marybeth Kelly asked if the RV property could be subdivided, perhaps sectioning off the much-used athletic field and the excellent multi-use gym/stage/kitchen facilities. UUSD staff expects their consultant to complete the property appraisals by May 8, and will ask that the subdivision question be included in their analysis. Chris Boyd will ensure this issue is placed on the RVMAC May 10 agenda and will bring community views to the next 7-11 meeting.