

PANIL Notes

Volume 28 Issue 3—Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League—PO Box 20375—Oakland, CA 94620—February 2003

Kerry Hamill speaks

School district crisis

By Gail Jara



Kerry Hamill

School District at the January 9 PANIL meeting.

How did the District get \$40 million in the red? Hamill gave three reasons: **Attendance is down.** Schools get paid so much each day for each student who attends school that day. Lower enrollment and absences from school mean reduction in funds paid to the school. In the last two years, enrollment in the Oakland schools "went dramatically down," said Hamill. **Salaries are up.** The 24% increase over 3 years in salaries awarded to Oakland's teachers produced striking increases in student performance at the same time that it caused a huge drain on the District's funds. **Oversight was absent**—for many years. Although Hamill acknowledges that "we should have seen it ourselves," the person in Superintendent Dennis Chaconas' office assigned to monitor the finances didn't bring the deficit to light. The independent auditor hired by the School Board didn't bring it to light.

If legislation authorizing a state loan is passed, a state administrator, to be appointed by the new California Superintendent of Schools, Jack O'Connell, will take over management

of the District, shifting the School Board to an advisory role and replacing Dennis Chaconas as the decision-maker. Hamill suggested that people let O'Connell know what qualities and qualifications the citizens of Oakland want in an administrator and what goals they have for their schools. Contact O'Connell at 916.319.0791 or joconnell@cde.ca.gov.

Under consideration now by the Oakland School Board (before the State takes over) are several possible ways to reduce spending, said Hamill. They are:

- freeze salaries: After the raises of the last two years, a salary freeze may not have a detrimental effect. However, some say that a freeze for the newest of the teachers would be a hardship.
- eliminate personnel: Some credentialed teachers (or counselors) who are not spending at least 80% of their time in the classroom could be candidates for firing. Oakland Unified School District has some teachers on special assignment (TSAs) and they may be candidates.
- sell some real estate: Sale of the District Office Building at 2nd Avenue near Lake Merritt would bring in a one-time influx of cash. Critics caution us to be alert to what 'insiders' might benefit if the school district property goes up for grabs. Hamill says she plans to convene a group of developers to get their ideas.

(Continued on page 2)

LIBRARY ALERT

On February 7, at a special budget workshop, City Manager Robert Bobb will present to the city council four options for reducing hours or closing branches designed to reduce the city's library budget by \$2.1MM (when combined with other cuts in service, materials, and staff). The proposals are:

- Close Temescal, Brookfield, Melrose, Elmhurst, Martin Luther King, Lakeview and West Oakland; other 8 remain open.
- Keep all 15 branches open but only three days a week.
- Rockridge, Asian, and Dimond open 5 days a week; close King and Lakeview; keep remaining 10 open 3 days a week.
- West Oakland, Rockridge, Asian, Brookfield, Cesar Chavez, Eastmont, and Dimond open 5 days a week; Golden Gate, Montclair, and Temescal open 3 days a week; King, Lakeview, Melrose, Elmhurst, and Piedmont Avenue would be closed.

Bobb is said to favor the last proposal.

PANIL is initiating a campaign to save the Piedmont Avenue branch and all Oakland branches. We need volunteers to get our petition signed. If you can help—email rklahti@aol.com or call 510.655.1723. We are also encouraging residents to contact city officials to communicate their opposition to any closures.

See box page 2

PANIL MEETING — Thursday, February 6, 7:30 pm,

Piedmont Gardens, 110 41st Street, 11th Floor, Sky Room

Home Improvements: a panel discussion on restoring or remodeling your old house featuring Restoration Consultant Jane Powell, author of *Bungalow Kitchens and Bungalow Bathrooms*, an Architect (To be announced), and a Contractor (To be announced).

Free information on Oakland's building permits (what needs a permit and how do you get one), working safely with lead paint in old houses, and renting tools FREE! from the Tool Lending Library.
(To place an item on the agenda, please call Valerie Winemiller at 510.653.4552)

**Piedmont Avenue
Neighborhood
Improvement League
PO Box 20375
Oakland CA 94620**

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PANIL Notes

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(School crisis continued from page 1)

- close some schools where enrollment is declining
- shift the security force in schools now to the City of Oakland
- eliminate the middle management in the District hierarchy. Each school in Oakland reports to one of 14 Executive Directors whom Chaconas has added to his staff.

A suggestion from the audience at the PANIL meeting—to provide early retirement for teachers—got a favorable response from Hamill and the other audience members. John Woodbury of PANSA urged that programs be reduced rather than eliminated. He said it is harder to re-create than to re-build.

Everyone agreed that Chaconas' efforts and leadership have resulted in dramatic increases in math and reading scores in grades 2-8. (See the article in PANIL Notes [October 2002] describing the scores at Piedmont Avenue Elementary School.) Nobody wants to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Hamill sent a list and analysis of the cuts proposed by Chaconas and asked for comments. A copy of the list is available from PANSA: 510.654.6591 or drjohnw@ix.netcom.com. The teachers' union and the Oakland Education Association also have proposals for cutbacks and savings.

Hamill is a frequent speaker at PANIL meetings. She and her family live in the neighborhood, on Fairmont; her children attend Montero Middle School and Piedmont Avenue Elementary School.



**This Valentine's Day—
say "I love you" in lights**

By Sandy Strehlou

Are you looking for the perfect way to say "I love you" this Valentine's Day? Well, look no further—this year, you can say it in steel and light, making your love a part of Oakland's landscape and history.

For a \$75 dollar contribution to the Oakland Splash Pad Park Fountain, you can have your Valentine message stenciled into a stainless steel grating that will be back-lit at night around a fountain, soon to be the center piece of Splash Pad Park—the open area across from the Grand Lake

Theatre on Lake Park Way between Grand and Lakeshore. There is no more enduring way to declare your love. It is better than a box of fattening chocolates, and will outlast the cliché of a dozen roses by at least a hundred years.

The Splash Pad Park area community, represented by a small group of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers, has been fundraising for a year or so. They are at Grand Lake Farmers' Market every Saturday morning. They hope to raise the \$40,000 needed to build a fountain in the soon-to-be renovated Splash Pad Park. Though renovation construction is slated to begin in November, the group has not yet raised enough money to pay for the fountain—an element they feel will be an essential part of the park and provide a meeting spot, event space, and farmers' market.

Want to know where to sign up? It's easy. Call Ken at 510.451.6537; go to www.geocities.com/splashpad, or visit the fundraising volunteers at their table, Saturdays, at the Grand Lake Farmers' Market. Make checks payable to Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation, (with "Splash Pad Fountain" written on the memo line) and mail to: Splash Pad Fountain, c/o 3801 Balfour Avenue, Oakland, CA, 94610.

**Before February 7
Contact city officials
about library cutbacks**

Mayor Jerry Brown

1 Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA 94612
238.3141/238.4731 (fax)
officeofthemayor@oaklandnet.com

City Manager Robert Bobb

1 Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA 94612
238.3301/238.2223 (fax)
citymanager@oaklandnet.com

Councilmember Jane Brunner

1 Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA 94612
238.7001/238.6910 (fax)
jbrunner@oaklandnet.com

Carmen Martinez

Director of Library Services
Oakland Main Library
125 14th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
238.3281
cmartinez@oaklandnet.com

Fire-safe restoration

By Valerie Winemiller

Ironically, a most dangerous period in an old house's life can be when it is being restored or remodeled. Modern fire detection and firefighting have greatly reduced the loss of life but the number of historic buildings lost per year has remained steady for over a decade.

A fire can reach 1,100° F in five minutes; hot enough that structural steel begins to melt. Wood members and antique finishes burn at far lower temperatures.

Fighting fire in an old house presents special problems. Victorian "balloon" frame construction lacks fireblocks in the walls. Most houses in the PANIL area were constructed after fireblocks came into use, but Oakland firemen report they sometimes find post-Victorian houses that were constructed "the old way." Narrow stairs, furnaces in tight crawl spaces, and tiny attic hatches impede firefighting. Dropped ceilings allow fire to move rapidly but out of view. Opening walls and ceilings during renovations removes their fire resistance at the same time that construction tools and equipment introduce potential fire hazards.

These fire-safe renovation practices can help you preserve your beautiful old house.

- Do not allow painters to use torches or heat guns to remove old paint. Old wood is dry, and dust and debris trapped inside walls is flammable. A fire can smolder in the walls for hours after the workers leave, only to burst into flame while you're asleep. (Heat also vaporizes lead in old [pre-1978] paint, and is a hazard to workers and your family.)
- Have the pilot light turned off before putting a drop cloth over a gas stove, floor furnace, or space heater.
- Store and use flammable paints, solvents, and wood refinishing products away from potential heat sources. Make sure workers have an appropriate metal container for oily rags, and make sure they use it.
- Persuade workers to become protectors, using materials thoughtfully and moving away from the job site if they are going to smoke.
- Upgrade old electrical systems to avoid overloading wiring with heavy equipment—or with your home office machinery after construction.

When other renovations are finished, the fireplace and chimney can still present dangers unless precautions are taken. Have your fireplace and chimney checked by a professional. Old mortar can fail, allowing heat and flame to attack nearby wood members. Modern liners can correct this, and also help with earthquake reinforcement.

After the late 1800s, shallow fireboxes designed for coal or gas flame became more common. These fuels burn at a lower temperature than wood, and the fireboxes are often not designed for high-heat wood fires. Have your professional check to see that joists and other wood members are not set too close to the firebox or chimney, where the heat can set them to smoldering. All wood members must be at least 2" away, including those supporting the hearth. The wood mantel must be at least 6" from the firebox opening on each side, and 12" from the top of the firebox. Ideally, there should be airspace between the back of the mantel and the firebox. Your antique mantel adds irreplaceable charm, not to mention financial value, to your house. If your fireplace doesn't measure up, consider installing a gas log system, or use your fireplace for a seasonal dried arrangement instead of fires.

Fire-damaged house parts can be replicated, but the building is irrevocably changed. The cost of custom milling old-style trims may not be covered by your fire insurance. And the replacement is still a replica, without the mellow patina of age; part of the historic fabric of our neighborhood is lost. Renovate with care, and enjoy your old house for generations.

(Sources: *Preservation: the Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Nov/Dec 2002, "A Burning Question," p. 30. *Old House Journal*, Feb 2003, "Hot Under the Hearth," p. 83)



Calendar

PANIL

General Meeting

2/6, Thursday, 7:30 pm
Sky Room, 11th Floor
Piedmont Gardens,
110 41st Street, 655.1723

Steering Committee

2/27, Thursday, 7 pm
655.1723

Glen Echo Creek

Work Day

2/8, Saturday, 9:30 am
Monte Vista Avenue, 654.1930

PANSA

General Meeting

Book Care Night

2/4, Tuesday, 7 pm
Piedmont Avenue School

First Friday Night Out

2/7, Plymouth Church, 7 pm
Music, Board Games, Food
424 Monte Vista, 654.5300

Church of St. Leo the Great

2/4-4/8, Tuesday, 7:30 pm
Program for Catholics
considering returning to their
church community
176 Ridgeway, 654.6177

Jane Brunner's Monthly Meeting

2/1, Saturday, 10 am
Peralta Elementary School
460 63rd Street, 238.7001
Topic: Senior Needs and
Resources in North Oakland

Piedmont Avenue Branch Library

160 41st Street
597.5011

Family Storytimes

Toddlers

Wednesday, 10:30 am

Pre School

Wednesday, 11 am

Lawyers in the Library

1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 5:45 pm

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League
P.O. Box 20375
Oakland, CA 94620
www.panil.org

Count Me In!

Please check your expiration date

_____ Here's my check for \$_____ (minimum \$15.00) to join PANIL.

_____ I will distribute PANIL Notes to my neighbors.

Name/s _____

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Phone/Email _____

Mail to PANIL, PO Box 20375, Oakland, CA 94620
 Contributions to PANIL are not tax deductible



Neela & William Manley
4132 Gilbert Street
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PANSA

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood School Association

Piedmont Avenue School Library—4314 Piedmont Avenue
General Meeting and Book Care Night
—first Tuesday of each month, 7 pm
Call 510.654.6591 for more information