Evanston City-School Liaison Committee
Special Meeting
September 10, 2013
Minutes

PRESENT:
City-School Liaison Committee
Jane Grover, 7th Ward Alderman
Mark Tendam, 6th Ward Alderman
Claudia Garrison, D65 School Board
Candace Chow, D65 School Board
Scott Rochelle, D202 School Board
Bill Geiger, D202 School Board

Evanston High School District 202 (ETHS)
Eric Witherspoon, D202 School Superintendent
Mark Metz, D202 School Board
Pat Savage Williams, D202 School Board
Gretchen Livingston, D202 School Board
Vernon Clark, D202 Associate Principal
Bill Stafford, D202 Chief Financial Officer
Sam Pettineo, D202 Safety Director
Will McConnell, D202 Community Relations

Evanston/Skokie CC School District 65
Barb Hiller, D65 Interim Chief Education Officer
Mary Brown, D65 Interim Superintendent and Business Manager

City of Evanston
Elizabeth Tisdahl, Mayor
Wally Bobkiewicz, City Manager
Joe McRae, Deputy City Manager & Interim Parks, Recreation & Community Services Director
Richard Eddington, Chief of Police
Grant Farrar, Corporation Counsel
Kate Todd, Executive Assistant, City Manager's Office

Others
Betty Ester, Resident
Madelyn Ducre, Resident,
Albert Gibbs, Resident
Eileen Hogan Heineman, Evanston/North Shore YWCA
Kathy Lyons, Moran Center
Lee Williams, Evanston Now
Bob Seidenberg, Evanston Review
Mary Gavin, Evanston RoundTable
Jennie Fisher, Evanston Patch

The Special Meeting to discuss safe school zones was called to order at 7:03 pm by Alderman Jane Grover and introductions were made. It was agreed that public comment be delayed until
after the discussion. Interested parties were invited to come to the table and speak as the meeting progressed. Safe School Zones were last discussed at the May, 2013 City-School Liaison Committee meeting. Since then, further discussions have been held at other City committees. This group was encouraged to look beyond the state statute definition of a “safe school zone,” and think more about what Evanston hopes to accomplish and how best to achieve safe school zones in general. This is an open question in hopes of finding common ground.

Safe school zone defines an area that feels safe to everyone, students, parents, school employees and neighbors. The group generally felt children feel safe and families feel safe sending children to city schools. However, this is a time when safety is a concern in general, otherwise we would not be talking about it.

Superintendent Witherspoon reported on a State survey of ETHS students, to which 85% of the student body responded. Results showed:
- 90% feel safe in classrooms
- 87% feel safe in bathrooms and halls
- 58% feel safe outside school

(Information on this survey is available in the last D202 School Board packet. The question of "outside school" does apply to the immediate neighborhood.)

ETHS wishes to designate and supervise a safe school zone area which includes the sidewalks across the street from the school. School officials wish to enable school safety personnel to do across the street, exactly what they do now on the ETHS side of the street. School officials are concerned with the occasional 2% of instances when concern over groups congregating across the street appears threatening. It doesn't happen that often, and often they are gang affiliated. At times like this, currently there is no space for ETHS students to get away -- hardly space to wait for the bus. Students report concerns. If those making threats/gang signs, etc. were on ETHS side, school safety personnel have authority to ask them to move. ETHS has no authority across the street. ETHS intends not to harass, but to approach those causing reasonable suspicion. This authority is to be used for a reasonable threat and primarily during dismissal time.

The City is concerned that police will be involved in asking both students and non-students to move along across the street, and what that will mean in terms of additional arrests for trespassing. Currently ETHS does not have any authority across the street, and only option for ETHS as it stands now is to call the police. It could become unlawful for someone to stand on the street corner. Concern is that people just standing on the sidewalk would be asked to move along. (When students are asked to move along on the ETHS side, ETHS safety personnel already involve City police if individuals do not comply and school discipline is not an option.)

What is the problem we are trying to solve? Is it just the 2% of times someone may be causing trouble? Is the problem with students who have been expelled, non-students, outsiders from other communities? Is the solution for ETHS to have authority to go across the street and ask people to move along? Or, is there another solution?

School personnel want to take good care of students and will take them home, even before dismissal, if necessary. Every situation differs, some situations escalate and students are not always cooperative. They want to settle it themselves. Even if school personnel are aware of gang activity, sometimes reinforcements are needed.
Residents encouraged looking at the law. Unlawful activity seems to have decreased in the area. People living in the community are not afraid. Why expand the boundary, when it is already established by state law? School officials responded that the current state law applies increased penalties for guns and drugs. The question arose of whether current state law applies to other offenses. Group needs clarity on the ramifications of current state statute, and further information to see if it provides direction relevant to this problem.

Clarification was made regarding the current actions ETHS officials can take. School can take disciplinary action on own students. If a situation gets violent, staff can involve police officers. Do they arrest? Not usually. Evanston Police officers are very good at dealing with a threatening situation and deescalating. It rarely gets to point where officers restrain or arrest a person. Even if an incident does not involve ETHS students and it gets out of hand, police are good at defusing.

Are the threatening problems always across the street? Yes. That is what frightens ETHS staff.

Residents from the area spoke, maintaining that the City does have tools and does deal with it. Police are almost always out of cars and at corners. If police are there why is this needed? Response from ETHS is that they are trying to be preventative, before it gets out of control. Police response is great, but by then it may be out of control. ETHS staff believe they can increase prevention, and keep kids from getting into trouble that might be preventable.

It was agreed that ETHS does a great job with dismissal. If the track record is good on one side of street, it is expected that the track record would be good across the street.

It was recommended that we track concerns - especially if community members or business owners feel they have been mistreated. Strongly suggest keeping a record of concerns if this proposal goes forward.

Concern was expressed about enforcement of the IGA, especially regarding expelled/ suspended students who may be in the area waiting for a bus. If the boundary is extended that becomes a large area in which they cannot go. For those who are not students, how would they be served notice that they are breaking the law simply by being there? Will they be arrested? Again, ETHS officials maintained that a student who has been expelled or suspended waiting on a bus would be present on lawful business, so this is not an issue. IGA is not intended to victimize community, students, or former students. ETHS is doing this in good faith to protect all students. This is simply an option to take measures if concerns are heightened.

The question was asked if we need formal agreement for this? ETHS officials proposed that if they give it a try, they plan to keep very careful records to maintain a safe environment and hope community will be pleased. This is a good faith effort.

Residents stated again that if the presence of the police does not cease whatever is of concern, how will ETHS staff make things safer? Why not work more with the police? Those who will be victimized are the ones who are living there. How can residents trust anyone when they are not breaking the law and are asked to move along in their own neighborhood already? Overreaching will make residents feel uncomfortable in their community. In other neighborhood situations, ETHS has not responded and issues have been resolved by calling the police.

Mayor Tisdahl suggested that the City-School Committee recommend that the City Council instruct the City Manager to direct the Evanston Police Department to compile data for the next
month or two on incidents in which the Police have intervened, and give City Council this data to consider. Data will help City Council make an informed decision.

Going forward, Chief Eddington said Police can have those incidents recorded. ETHS can go back several years with data of gang activity and issues across the street. If nothing happens in the next month or so, then some of the concerns may be resolved.

Residents stated that if the neighborhood has not been seeing increased unlawful activity in recent past, there is no need for this IGA. Even if they are in gangs, if they are not doing anything, they have every right to be there.

It was recommended that we collect data and put together a small group to look at how the “safe school zone” idea would be implemented, and answer key issues and valid concerns to avoid unintended consequences. This group would help to define what this will be and will not be. Neighborhood residents felt the IGA should have come to the community first.

At the close of the meeting, Alderman Grover made the following recommendations:
   1. Collect data, information and statistics about interventions
   2. Establish a small group to look at options
   3. Report back to community and include larger community in what has been found out.

The next City-School meeting will be held on October 10, 2013 and is probably too soon to expect a report back on this matter.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Todd
Executive Assistant, City Manager's Office