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MPUSD

Board to provide update on project

By Molly Gibbs

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Monterey Peninsula Unified School District’s governing board will meet Tuesday night and provide an update on the district’s controversial stadium project following a court ruling in June.

After nearly two years of legal back-and-forth, Judge Thomas Wills of the Monterey County Superior Court concluded last month that the district’s environmental impact report “was sufficient, except in two respects which probably are easily remedied.”

The ruling was in response to a successful motion filed by the district seeking clarification and narrowing of the remaining steps required of the district to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Proposed in 2019 and budgeted for an estimated \$12 million, the district’s Dan Albert Stadium renovation project consists of creating a lower softball and multi-use field, a multi-purpose weight room, added visitor bleachers, a new press box, improved accessible seating and stadium lights.

Under the California Environ-

mental Quality Act (CEQA), the district was required to identify and evaluate any potential environmental impacts that the project may have. Any impacts deemed “significant” — meaning they could potentially cause a “substantial adverse change in the physical environment” — required the district to offer methods and alternatives to mitigate impacts.

The district’s Governing Board approved a resolution that certified the final 2,000-page Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on

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Dan Albert Stadium at Monterey High School in 2020.

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Project

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July 27, 2021. The EIR included legally binding mitigation measures addressing key areas of residents' concern, including: restricting use of the fields, limiting the public address system and limiting light use to certain times of the year.

But despite many community members' support for the project and the district's proposed mitigation measures, the project quickly ground to a halt after a lawsuit was filed.

The Preserving the Peace case — initially filed Aug. 27, 2021 — complained that the project violated CEQA and local laws and argued the renovations would cause significant environmental damage, light pollution and disruption to residential areas.

In December, the court ruled in favor of the district on four of the five causes of action but also concluded that the district should conduct additional CEQA analysis or prepare clarifying language for seven specific categories related to the project including pedestrian safety, traffic, parking and signage.

In June, the court reversed its prior ruling on five of the seven categories previously found to be insufficient, after the district filed a motion for clarification and reconsideration.

The only two remaining issues include clarification of the environmental report's conclusion regarding parking supply and demand — there had been a typo that incorrectly stated there would be a significant impact — and addition of a verification process related to the noise mitigation measure adopted by the district (the previous EIR didn't provide for monitoring or reporting of sound levels).

District staff have rec-

ommended the board rescind its previous resolution and adopt a separate resolution with the amended EIR that addresses the two issues and complies with the court's judgment.

The district's modifications to the proposed project include: prohibiting use of the stadium and lower field on Sundays; prohibiting use of the stadium and lower field after sunset on Saturdays; limiting weekday use of the stadium by non-school related activities to between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. and adding security to direct traffic and parking for sporting events.

The modifications also include limitations on the use of the PA system and field lighting. The modifications specify that: non-school related activities will be prohibited from using the PA system or field lighting; while lights may be used for all evening football games, the stadium lights may only be used for up to four games played by each of the four other high school's field sports during the months of October through March (for a total of 16 games) and turned off by 8 p.m.; and lights may be used for sports practice from October through March only and be turned off by 8 p.m.

If adopted by the board, the resolution would determine that "the social, educational, technological, economic and legal benefits outweigh the proposed projects' anticipated environmental impacts." The resolution would also signify the board's approval of the proposed project and direction to district staff to file a notice of determination with Monterey County.

Tuesday's board meeting will be held at 540 Canyon Del Rey at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will also be streamed live and uploaded to the board's archived meetings shortly after.