

News Clips

Headlines

Denver Post

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

- Historic school's new direction
- Dems warn CU on Benson
- 18 Denver schools propose autonomy

Rocky Mountain News

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

- More DPS students mean more funding
- Lawmakers eye Benson

Denver Post

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

Historic schools' new direction

By Kevin Simpson

The Denver Post

<mailto:ksimpson@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Historic%20schools'%20new%20direction>

Article Last Updated: 02/12/2008 06:07:30 AM MST

Virginia Caranci's view of Louisville Middle School unfolds like a flickering newsreel, starting with her grandfather's hand in its 1939 birth as a Depression-era public works project.

The blond brick evokes days when the building also served as the high school.

Here she is being crowned homecoming queen of 1950 in a gymnasium filled with red-and-black crepe paper and a backbeat of swing music.

In these halls she meets her future husband. On this football field, both parents gaze proudly on the homecoming coronations of two daughters.

So when plans for a much-needed expansion and modernization threatened to change the face of the building, Caranci and some others cried foul in this mining town turned bustling bedroom community.

But then, passions usually do run high when the interests of school districts, historic preservationists, environmentalists and residents converge.

Debate over aging or empty school buildings long regarded as community cornerstones recently has roiled Louisville and Boulder — and might soon surface in Denver.

"All we're asking," said Caranci, a member of the Louisville Historical Commission, "is to keep the facade of the building, some way, somehow, so that people at least have that part of it to remember."

Of course, Caranci's historical touchstone is another neighbor's eyesore, a dull edifice standing in the way of a 21st-century facility.

"To some extent, you've just got to get over it," said Jennifer Boucher-Reid, 39, who has three children under age 5 who might one day attend the school. "I understand that things from a long time ago are important, but you have to have a little sense about it."

Tight bonds to schools

As student populations shift and the harsh realities of education finance leave little on the table to upgrade facilities — and sometimes dictate that they be closed altogether — school buildings become objects of civic skirmishes.

In the Boulder Valley School District, conflict over three properties — two renovations and one proposed redevelopment — has underscored the tight bonds between locals and their school buildings.

Those spats might foreshadow what lies ahead in Denver, where a massive reform plan will shutter eight elementary schools. Real estate sales could pour cash into the district's till. But redevelopment also could change neighborhood dynamics — for better or worse.

The Denver schools — Remington, Smedley, Del Pueblo, Whiteman, Fallis, Mitchell, Wyman and Hallett — were casualties of declining enrollment. Their closures will save the district an estimated \$3.5 million a year.

Emotional pleas to save some of the schools failed. But administrators have vowed to pay

close attention to neighborhood voices as they decide what to do with the eight properties.

"We recognize that it's a delicate topic," said a DPS spokesman, Alex Sanchez. "So we want to be sure and not make decisions without engaging school-specific communities."

Effects of a closing

Although school closings can be jolting to neighborhoods, they also can provide economic infusion not seen in decades, said Ken Schroepel, an urban planner for Matrix Design Group who tracks core-city projects on his website, www.denverinfill.com <<http://www.denverinfill.com>> .

"Elementary schools tend to be located in the heart of a community," he said. "It's an opportunity to introduce retail to the interior of a neighborhood — a coffee shop or neighborhood-scale retail where prior to that time, there was no good place for it to fit."

The closing of Stevens Elementary in the Congress Park neighborhood caused huge controversy in the early 1990s, when neighbors who had rallied support for a bond issue felt betrayed when their own school was shut down and sold.

Charles Nash, who has redeveloped three Denver Public Schools properties — including Stevens, which he transformed into a 23-unit condo project — said community buy-in is so important that he goes door to door seeking feedback.

"In every case, I do a very thorough feasibility study to make sure the neighborhood is not going to be upset and to be sure they know what my impact will be," Nash said.

One of Denver schools that will close, Smedley Elementary in northwest Denver, already has been designated a historic landmark. Denver Public Schools periodically reviews its buildings for historic status and, if a property qualifies, the Denver landmark commission retains some say in any renovation or redevelopment.

Concerns in Louisville

Preservation issues aren't always spelled out so clearly.

In Boulder Valley, where the average age of school buildings is 44 years, a nearly \$300 million bond issue in 2006 has powered significant renovations — including those at Louisville and Casey middle schools, where architectural issues have rankled some.

"We don't want to sound callous or indifferent to historical preservation, but our primary obligation is the education of our students," said Briggs Gamblin, spokesman for the Boulder Valley district.

Last week, planners continued to listen to concerns about the renovation in fast-growing

Louisville, where almost half the population has arrived since 1990.

"As citizens, we don't have a lot of faith that decisions are being made within the context of Louisville and its history," said Heather Lewis of the town's Historic Preservation Commission. She would like designers to take another look at preserving the middle school.

But proponents of the current plan point out that time spent mulling over more options could ultimately cause some elements to be scaled back due to rising costs.

"Historic preservation in this day of limited resources means we have to make hard choices," said Joe Alper, an 11-year Louisville resident who has a seventh-grader at Louisville Middle. "You really have to make the argument that something is truly historic, not just old or full of memories."

The renovation plan for Casey, which opened in 1924, has roiled some residents on two counts. Although a design compromise will leave two building facades intact with new construction behind them, that alternative isn't true historical preservation and might not be the most environmentally sound choice, critics say.

Taking into account the energy required to demolish an older structure, they argue that often the greenest buildings are the ones already built.

James Hewat, a Boulder historic preservation planner and parent who served on the Design Advisory Team, said he learned a lot about the difficulty balancing educational, environmental and historical concerns — but wishes more time was spent exploring the feasibility of keeping Casey intact.

"I've learned a lot about all the pressures, the things a school needs to deliver," he said. "It's pretty hard to get them all."

Development looms

When the construction dust finally settles, at least those communities will still have schools.

Critics have emerged in force to contest the proposed redevelopment of Boulder's Washington Elementary School, which opened in 1904 and closed in 2003 because of low enrollment.

After the city passed on the property, the school district struck a deal with a developer for \$3.9 million — money the district would earmark for capital improvements.

But opposition has challenged Boulder-based Wonderland Hill Development Co.'s proposed project, which includes co-housing units where residents share some common spaces, plus commercial space and detached homes. The Washington School

Neighborhood Association mobilized a petition drive that gathered more than 7,000 signatures to block zoning — enough to bring the project to a temporary halt.

Spokesman John Gless said the proposed project tries to cram too much on the 3-acre site. And though the school is closed, the playground and adjoining fields still provide the equivalent of a "pocket park" where kids play softball and soccer.

Gless, a planning consultant who lives in Fort Collins, grew up across the street from the school in a house where his parents still live. He figures that between the classroom and playground he might have spent more time on the Washington property than almost anyone.

"I don't know that it gives me an emotional attachment," he says, "but it does give me a highly developed sense of place for what it means, what that space means for that neighborhood."

Wonderland maintains that the project density is consistent with other Boulder neighborhoods — and necessary to meet the property's hefty price tag. Wonderland says it has tried to deal reasonably with neighbors' concerns as talks continue toward an April 8 sale date.

Finding motivations

But a process that modernizes or utterly transforms old schools, however well-intentioned, almost inevitably ignites passions tinged with mutual distrust.

"It remains to be seen how ingrained people are in their point of view, and what the real ulterior motives are," said Terri Furman, director of sales and marketing for Wonderland. "Is it just to stop the project? Or to find a compromise?"

"Somebody," Gless said, "has to blink."

Kevin Simpson: 303-954-1739 or ksimpson@denverpost.com
<<mailto:ksimpson@denverpost.com>>

Dems warn CU on Benson

Legislators leery of partisan past

[By Allison Sherry](#)
[The Denver Post](#)

<<mailto:asherry@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Dems%20warn%20CU%20on%20Benson>>

Article Last Updated: 02/12/2008 05:04:27 AM MST

After a week and a half of one-on-one coffees and public promises to shake money from the legislature's Joint Budget Committee, the sole finalist for the University of Colorado presidency is struggling to gain ground among certain Democrats.

In fact, it could be getting worse for Bruce Benson, an oilman and Republican operative who was named the finalist for the job earlier this month.

One Democratic regent who initially wrote him a letter of support for the job decided over the weekend not to back him in the final vote.

And after meeting with Benson, House Majority Leader Alice Madden, D-Boulder, said he was "charming," but she signed on to a highly critical two-page letter Monday and said CU will have an uphill battle at the Capitol with Benson in charge.

"I don't think he realizes the difficulty he will have in this building," Madden said. "Higher education is like throwing a hambone in a dogfight. They are fighting over scraps. I imagine the other presidents are gleeful about this because they will win the fight for the scraps."

To be sure, Benson also has supporters among Democrats. Last week, Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet and Cole Finegan — both former chiefs of staff to Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper — were joined in singing Benson's praises by state board of education member Elaine Gantz Berman, former Colorado Commission on Higher Education member David Ethan Greenberg and Anna Jo Haynes of Mile High Montessori.

"When it comes to public education in Colorado, at all levels, few have walked the walk more than Benson," they wrote. "Despite his enthusiasm for all things Republican, when it comes to helping poor kids get an opportunity to learn, Benson will join forces with anyone who shares his passion."

Benson, who has been traveling to the four CU campuses, said he would keep fighting.

Even though Regent Cindy Carlisle has said she no longer backs him as the sole finalist, Benson said he would likely take the job if he was voted in 6-3.

Two other Democratic regents, Michael Carrigan and Stephen Ludwig, voted against his sole candidacy, though Ludwig said he hasn't decided whether he ultimately will support Benson. Benson and Ludwig met last week.

"It was a good meeting, but I still have concerns," Ludwig said, "the same ones I expressed before. How will the lawmakers react and how that can impact our funding remains my concern."

The regents, who have a private dinner with Benson Wednesday, won't vote on him until next week.

"I think I can work with people," Benson said. "I've never been afraid of work. . . . I'm not going to get real exercised about anything. I've been doing this for 20 years. I'm not going to get upset about anything."

Regent Steve Bosley, who was on the presidential search committee, said he thinks Benson is qualified because of his nontraditional, political background.

"We weren't naive coming into this thinking that it wouldn't cause people to talk about it," Bosley said, noting that the search committee supported him 15-0. "I just think Bruce has had an interesting background. . . . He's certainly his own man."

Still, Madden, who can't run for re-election because of term limits, said she is concerned.

"It's who is going to go the distance for CU," she said. "It's who is the go-to legislator in the majority who has influence. . . . If you were the subject of personally insulting campaign materials, you may not do a favor for the person who funded it all."

Madden was referring to the Trailhead Group, which was responsible for negative attacks on Democrats running for political office, attacks that the legislators' letter describes as "negative, insulting and inaccurate."

Benson, while not largely involved in Trailhead's daily operations, funded the group when it started.

Staff writer Jennifer Brown contributed to this report. Allison Sherry: 303-954-1377 or asherry@denverpost.com <<mailto:asherry@denverpost.com>>

18 Denver schools propose autonomy

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/12/2008 04:13:19 AM MST

Eighteen northeast Denver schools are seeking to build an autonomous school zone — freeing them from union and district rules they say are bureaucratic barriers to improving student achievement.

Principals from several of the schools met Monday with 50 community members and educators at Montbello High School to outline the proposal, which will be presented this month to the school board.

Principals from the 18 schools want to create a "zone of innovation," giving them control over their budget, the educational program in the schools, staffing and incentives.

They want their own human resources department, a budget support office and an enrollment center to help schools balance populations — sending more students to schools with empty classrooms and alleviating crowding in others.

"We're talking about putting an umbrella out here to make sure our kids get help," said Ruth Frazier, principal of Greenwood School that serves kindergartners to eighth-graders. "We've come together as a region. . . . This zone is to create a new operating system."

The move is similar, in parts, to autonomy agreements and waiver requests being sought by other Denver schools.

It also mirrors a legislative bill introduced by State Senate President Peter Groff.

The schools include Montbello, Martin Luther King Jr. Early College and Rachel B. Noel Middle School as well as several elementary schools and charter schools.

Frazier said the proposal was first discussed three years ago when principals discovered so many differences among schools — different uniforms, discipline policies and programs — in an area that was seeing tremendous growth.

Roughly 12,000 students are in the area, which would make it the eighth largest district in the state. However, the schools have not performed well.

In April, the school board gave approval to the principals to work out a way to make changes in the area, and the innovation zone is the result.

The ultimate goal is raise the achievement levels and eventually help students step from high school to post-secondary education, Frazier said.

School board member Kevin Patterson said the idea gives the decision-making power to the people who directly deal with the students.

"We're saying you guys know what you need," he said. "(Schools) have to be more nimble to do what we want them to do — raise student achievement."

Tammy Lewis, who has three children, said she wants to know how the schools would bring up scores but is pleased by the effort.

"This area needs this because we've gotten so left out," she said. "It sounds like a good idea, but a year from now, what are they going to have to show for it?"

Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com

[<mailto:jpmeyer@denverpost.com>](mailto:jpmeyer@denverpost.com)

Rocky Mountain News

Monday, February 12, 2008

SCHOOL BUDGET

More DPS students mean more funding

Most principals in Denver Public Schools received good news last week with their budget numbers for 2008-09.

School leaders on Friday were given their estimated annual figures under the new student-based budgeting system, which attaches dollars to students based on factors such as poverty and grade level.

The proposed budget includes \$42.8 million more for schools, including the pension yield and an estimated increase of 486 students.

Nancy Mitchell

Lawmakers eye Benson

Vow to fund attack ads called ‘most disconcerting’

By Berny Morson ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Key legislators voiced deep concern Monday about the proposed appointment of oilman Bruce Benson as University of Colorado president.

In a letter to CU’s Board of Regents, the lawmakers cited Benson’s lack of an advanced degree and his role in funding a conservative issues group that attacked Democrats in the last election.

“Most disconcerting,” the lawmakers said, was Benson’s threat to fund attacks in the 2008 election on Regent Paul Schauer, a fellow Republican. Schauer voted with Democrats in the selection of the board chairman.

The letter stops short of asking the regents not to appoint Benson as CU president and makes no threats.

The letter was signed by House Majority Leader Alice Madden, D-Boulder, Senate President Peter Groff, D-Denver, and 12 additional legislators. Absent from the group was House Speaker Andrew Romanoff, D-Denver, who said that the choice of CU president is up to the regents and shouldn’t be made into a political issue.

Regent Pat Hayes, who leads the nine-member board, said she hadn’t seen the letter but that the board will take it “very seriously.”

“Obviously, we value our relationship with the legislature. We’re not in a position to disregard that (the letter),” Hayes said.

The regents named Benson the sole finalist for CU president Jan. 30. Benson is a former state Republican Party chairman. He helped finance the Trailhead Group, which ran attack ads on Democrats.

Benson supporters note that he has fought for greater state funding of higher education, leads a group that raises money for Denver Public Schools, led a CU fund drive that raised \$1 billion and gave \$8 million himself to the school. The geology building is named for him.

Gov. Bill Ritter — the subject of some of the 2006 attack ads — has since named Benson co-chairman of his main education study group.

Benson ran into polite but pointed criticism from students and faculty at Boulder campus meetings last week. Another session is scheduled for today.

Madden, whose district includes the Boulder campus, said she has received about 70 phone calls from constituents about Benson. Most were negative, she said.

According to Schauer, the spat with Benson arose when the regent joined three Democrats on the board to elect Hayes — also a Republican — as chairwoman. The four other Republicans on the board backed Steve Bosley.

Schauer said that Benson threatened to fund attack ads if he ran for a second board term.

Benson said last week that the dispute has been misreported in the media and has been patched up. He said he will stay out of politics if hired as president.

Schauer said Monday that he has not committed to supporting Benson for president.

“I haven’t made an absolute final decision at this point,” Schauer said.

The regents will meet with Benson over dinner Wednesday. Then they will schedule a closed meeting to discuss the appointment, including the communications they have received. The final vote will be in public.

The three Democrats on the board are voicing skepticism about Benson, but only Cindy Carlisle, of Boulder, has said that she will vote against him.

Regent Steve Ludwig, a Democrat, said he believes that Benson could have trouble working with the legislature. Regent Michael Carrigan, also a Democrat, said he fears that Benson might be appointed on a party-line vote.