

WWPNA Byers Jr. High School Committee
Annual Report
April 30, 2009

Summary:

If you're interested in shaping the future of Byers Jr. High School, now is the time to get involved. (See **Call to action** below.) DPS staff has indicated they're interest in selling the Historic Landmark, located at 150 S Pearl St. The Board of Education will vote on the matter on June 18, 2009 at their regularly scheduled public meeting.

Detail:

In April 2008, DPS announced that they were looking to dispose of 12 pieces of property, Byers being one. In May 2008, DPS hired the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to assess the 12 properties. The ULI is a non-profit group, composed primarily of developers, that makes land-use recommendations. After conducting interviews with local stakeholders, the ULI presented to the Board of Education in August 2008. The ULI recommended that DPS *sell Byers, at market rate*, as soon as possible. The ULI suggested that the building was deteriorating quickly and would carry a high cost of renovation. Given Byers' location in a desirable neighborhood, the ULI suggested that Byers is a strong candidate for generating money through sale. The ULI recommended against selling or leasing to non-profits and suggested that the best use of the space was institutional (not residential.) The ULI team that this Committee spoke with was primarily Realtors, developers, and City officials charged with economic development. It's worth noting that this is the *first time* that the ULI has provided recommendations on school facilities and by their own admission, they assess buildings independent of their previous uses. It was apparent in both the interview process and the report to DPS Board of Education that the ULI is expert at development and construction but novice at matters relating to public education or use of public assets.

DPS staff presented the results of an internal review of their *entire asset pool* at the April 2009 Board of Education meeting. This review differed from the ULI study as DPS turned their attention to a small group of schools; coincidentally, this was also a group of 12. Byers Jr. High School again made the list. DPS projected school-age population growth over the next 10+ years and compared that with their existing inventory. DPS determined that Byers is excess space and is not needed in the near future. DPS staff believes that others schools adjacent to WWP will be able to absorb the demand for seats. Summary of the DPS study:

- In calculating the numbers of families in nearby neighborhoods, DPS used general population growth patterns which do not appear to include our growing family population. Lincoln Elementary grew from 60% capacity to 85% capacity during the five-year period ending October, 2008. As of May 2009, Lincoln has reached 93% capacity. Including the preschooler population, Lincoln is at 111%. Collectively, southeast Denver elementary schools are at 116% capacity.
- DPS stated that Jr. High School and High School utilization in Southern part of Denver are 50% and 82% respectively. But DPS included schools that are more than 5 miles from Washington Park in this assessment. Moreover, all the schools that DPS proposed as alternates to Byers are west of I-25.
- 66% of Denver's school-age children and currently served by "conventional" DPS schools
- Population growth among school age children in the Southern part of Denver is forecasted at 12% by 2020. (DPS noted that they don't have accurate info at a neighborhood level and that neighborhood growth above this number is possible.)
- DPS staff and the DPS Board of Education have made the strategic decision to focus on "large format schools". Byers is considered a large format school with 850 seats; selling Byers would be a departure from their strategy to hold on to larger buildings.

The full report is posted at:

http://board.dpsk12.org/meetings/agenda_archives/4-13-09/041309_BOE_Agenda_Attachments.pdf pages 27 – 61.

Some history on how Byers reached this point. In November 2003, Denver voters approved a general bond for DPS to renovate its facilities. Byers was prominently featured in their media campaign and press releases. In fact, Byers had the highest allocation of funds of any existing school in the entire City – more than \$8 million. Unfortunately for Byers, DPS backtracked from the plans that voters approved at the polls and Byers never saw that \$8 million for renovation. The doors have been closed since June 2003 and DPS has neglected to maintain the building; plywood boards replaced historic glass in the windows and deterioration in the exterior brick has been ignored. In 2005, DPS elected to trade the Byers athletic field with the City of Denver in exchange for land in the central Platte Valley, next to the Downtown Aquarium. DPS

insisted at the time that the Platte Valley land was 'essential for a future downtown school' and that Byers 'would not be sold' and was perfectly capable of operating as a school without its athletic field. The Platte Valley land was included in the ULI study and was recommended as ideal candidate for profit through a hold-and-then-sell approach. ULI added that the Platte land was *not appropriate* for school use.

The Byers Committee has followed the money that taxpayers approved for Byers. Here's a comment from DPS:

The \$8 million set aside for Byers in the 2003 General Obligation Bond Program was indeed re-purposed along with another \$3.4 million from the closure of Rosedale and Gove. In January 2006, Citizens Committee on Bond Expenditures approved the reallocation of the \$11.4 million for the following projects:

- \$1.7 million – Installation of fire sprinkler systems in schools
- \$3.8 million – Installation of fire alarms in schools
- \$2.4 million – Americans with Disabilities Act compliance school modifications
- \$.8 million – Installation of boilers in schools
- \$2.2 million – Installation of windows in schools
- \$.5 million – Installation of a learning landscape at a school

Call to action:

The future of Byers will be decided over the next two months. Now is the time to speak up and be heard. Byers Jr. High School is an asset of the City of Denver and its people. We believe that the residents of Denver entrusted Denver Public Schools to be the custodian of Byers and as such they should manage and maintain this valuable asset for use by future generations. You can help:

1. Write to the DPS and the DPS Board of Education!! Give them your feedback, let them know what the residents near the Byers School really think.

Superintendent Tom Boasberg:	superintendent@dpsk12.org
Jeannie Kaplan, District 3 – Byers District	jeannie_kaplan@dpsk12.org
David Suppes, DPS COO	David_Supes@dpsk12.org
Will Lee-Ashley, DPS Lead Analyst	WILL_LEE-ASHLEY@dpsk12.org
Marc Waxman, DPS New Schools	marc_waxman@dpsk12.org
Bruce Hoyt, East Washington Park	bruce_hoyt@dpsk12.org
Michelle Moss, District 2 and VP	michelle_moss@dpsk12.org
Kevin Patterson, District 4	kevin_patterson@dpsk12.org
Arturo Jimenez, Baker District	arturo_jimenez@dpsk12.org
Theresa Pena, Board President	theresa_pena@dpsk12.org
Jill Conrad, At Large Board Member	jill_conrad@dpsk12.org

2. Attend the upcoming DPS community input meeting on May 20th at the Slavens School (3000 S Clayton St) at 5:30pm.
3. Attend the June 18th meeting of the School Board. The meeting is at 900 Grant Street, starts at 5:30 and has a public comment period starting at 6:30PM. Each speaker will have three minutes to speak, but groups of four or more people speaking on the same topic will have 10 minutes collectively. To sign up to speak, please call the Board Office at 720-423-3210 by 5 p.m. the day before the public comment session.
4. Distribute pamphlets door-to-door. We need help canvassing the following neighborhoods: Speer, East Washington Park, and Baker.
5. Volunteer to help and/or give us your ideas. Email: mike.rusconi@gmail.com
6. Contribute financially! The West Washington Park Neighborhood Association (WWPNA) is a 100% volunteer organization. We need your help financially to continue advocating for residential concerns such as Byers Jr. High School. Contributions can be sent to WWPNA, P.O. Box 9866, Denver, CO 80209

Additional information is posted on the [WWPNA home page](http://www.wwpna.org) at www.wwpna.org.

To keep informed on a weekly basis, sign up for the [WWPNA listserv](http://www.wwpna.org). Access the WWPNA home page at www.wwpna.org. Click on the Email List link in the welcoming message from the Association. WWPNA sends two to four listserv messages per month, and only on topics that affect our residents. Our privacy policy states that we do not share or sell our residents information for any purpose outside of the Association.

- For any questions or concerns, please contact Charlie Busch by email at president@wwpna.org or by phone at 303-722-6220.

Schools play a key role in pulling in families and strengthening neighborhoods. Byers is located in the center of three predominately single family, low-density neighborhoods in an area that's adding children and families. Byers is a Historic Landmark build on the former homestead of William N. Byers; Denver's first postmaster general and the founder of Rocky Mountain News. The Byers Family sold the land to DPS for the construction of a school. With your help, we can preserve Byers as a place of learning and education.

The Byers Jr. High School Committee would like to acknowledge Councilman Chris Nevitt for his support. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with Councilman Nevitt and his team as we work to influence any next steps.

Related Information:

Pearl Street Arts Center (PSAC): <http://pearlstreetartscenter.art.officelive.com/default.aspx>

The Pearl Street Arts Center has approached DPS about leasing Byers to create a resource center for artists of all trades and crafts to learn, create and connect. PSAC has also suggested that some of ground could be used for a playground and/or dog park. WWPNA supports this use as it would maintain Byers as a place of learning while preserving the building for future shared-use by DPS. WWPNA would work closely to minimize sound, traffic, or any other impacts to near-neighbors.

Off-leash Dog Park: malcolmmurray@mac.com

Some near neighbors are in the process of gaining necessary City and DPS approvals to convert the existing tennis courts into a fenced, off-leash area. Please contact Malcolm with input.