Hermosa Beach school officials look to city for help with overcrowding

By Alana Garrigues, Daily Breeze

In an attempt to reduce overcrowding in Hermosa Beach schools, city officials are teaming with the school district to cushion the problem until a permanent fix can be found.

With View and Valley schools at 300 over capacity — and students squeezed into portables and multipurpose rooms — the district has been engaged in long-term facilities planning throughout the past year. In the meantime, city and school officials met in an unusual joint meeting last week to attempt to develop some ideas for temporary solutions.

The City Council, reacting to overcrowding concerns from residents, offered up rooms at South Park for school administrative staff to create more room on school campuses for students, among other quick fixes.

“Both the superintendent and city believe that a collaborative effort between the school district and the city will provide resources to meet the needs of after-school programs desired within the community,” a city report states.

Pat Escalante, superintendent of the Hermosa Beach City School District, has been in talks with City Manager Tom Bakaly to consider a swap in which district offices would be housed at city facilities.

One option under consideration was the Hermosa Beach Community Center, originally a school district property that was sold to the city 35 years ago. However, with two nonadjacent classrooms available, and a need for three rooms in close proximity, Escalante and Bakaly determined it would not fit the district’s needs.

According to Escalante, if the after-school PARK recreation program were shifted back to View School classrooms, three spaces would open up at the city’s South Park facilities, saving the city $40,000 in annual transportation costs busing the kids from the school to the park, and allowing the district to rent administrative office space for free.

Bakaly said that the solution would not cost the city any money.

While council members expressed concerns about parking for the district’s five administrative employees and noise during reconstruction at South Park, Escalante reassured them that watching and listening to construction that would benefit the community’s children would not be a problem, and that she and the other four employees were accustomed to working in tight parking conditions.
The move would open up the possibility of shifting the Valley School administrators to the district’s current offices, opening up limited space that could be used for classrooms or student programs. Beyond space, it would also increase school safety, according to school board members. Visitors now must enter the campus to locate the school offices, and, in a post-Sandy Hook world, schools are looking for ways to limit visitor access to school grounds.

The other less attractive option, according to Escalante, would be to install additional portable classrooms. Last summer, the district purchased six portables from the Inglewood Unified School District, and now nearly half of the district’s classrooms are portables.

Long-term, the district continues to look at North School and reconstruction possibilities within the district’s three properties.