Campus to offer social services
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Author: Maureen Magee

The latest in a series of new schools planned for City Heights may come with more than the standard amenities of playground, library and ball field.

The San Diego school district plans to join forces with the city to build a sprawling community campus featuring an elementary school, modern housing units designated for low-income families, vast park space and social services for local families under a proposal headed to the City Council and school board today.

Similar to the City Heights Urban Village development, this smaller project, a potential $150 million collaboration, would attempt to provide a variety of community services in one cohesive project.

"This could be a breakthrough in municipal relationships," Superintendent Alan Bersin said. "In the context of community development, the goal is to integrate schools into a whole variety of other needs."

In a meeting today, the City Council will vote on a plan to establish a joint governance entity of the city, redevelopment agency, housing commission and school district that would map out the project. The school board is also scheduled to consider the joint powers agreement later today.

Under the proposal, a board of directors representing each agency would oversee everything from finance to design.

The San Diego Unified School District is the only agency with the money to pay for its share of the proposed project. With the proceeds of a $1.5 billion bond measure passed by voters in 1998 to build and repair schools, the district has plans to build 13 schools to relieve crowding in the city’s urban core.

"There are risks being that we are the only party that has put money on the table," said Scott Patterson, the district's deputy chief operating officer. "The risk might be that we get very deeply involved and other parties can’t find the funding."

The district plans to spend $20 million to $30 million on the new school that is scheduled to open in the fall of 2006, Patterson said. The school would provide desks for 700 children and relieve crowding at nearby Edison, Hamilton and Rosa Parks elementary schools.

Although the boundaries have yet to be specified, the community campus would probably be on about 27 acres just west of Clark Middle School, near the intersection of
Fairmount and Myrtle avenues, stretching south just past Thorn Street.

School construction in the mid-city almost always means the demolition of homes and apartments and the loss of scarce housing that is affordable to poor families.

This project would add low-income housing to the neighborhood. However, it would increase the density in mid-city. School district planners estimate that 245 housing units would be eliminated to make way for the urban project, and 350 new units would be added.

In addition to the school, the project would feature more than nine acres of landscaped open spaces, ball fields and underground parking. A community center might offer a health clinic and child-care services.

The early planning of this mini-urban village was funded by Price Charities, the same group that operates a $16 million education reform effort in City Heights at Rosa Parks Elementary School, Clark Middle School and Hoover High School. Aiding in the planning was the San Diego State University National Center for the 21st Century Schoolhouse, a clearinghouse for innovative school design and academics.

Maureen Magee: (619) 542-4577; maureen.magee@uniontrib.com