

## Location of charter school still a mystery

### Everest prefers campus in Redwood City, district favors East Palo Alto site

BY SHAUN BISHOP

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With two months left until Everest Public High School is to open for its inaugural school year, parents still don't know where they will drop students off for the first day of classes.

Whether Everest is allowed to start up this fall at its preferred site in Redwood City now depends in large part on the city planning department, which is studying whether the industrial building administrators favor is suitable for the new charter school's initial class of 100 students.

The Sequoia Union High School District has been waging a months-long debate with Everest over the building at 955 Charter St., with the district saying it is inappropriate for a school because the soil of property next door is contaminated.

Everest officials have said they are confident that the polychlorinated biphenyls, also known as PCBs, on the Tyco Thermal Controls property will not pose a danger to students and can be cleaned up.

Still, Redwood City has hired an environmental consultant to study the contamination before it issues the school a permit to use the building. The city is also working on a parking and traffic study in response to concerns about inadequate parking on the site, City Attorney Stan Yamamoto said.

Yamamoto said there is no way to tell when the studies will be done, or whether city planners

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will recommend the school conduct a full environmental impact report, a process that would take months. School officials have said they hope to open in mid to late August.

“From the city’s standpoint we have no reason to delay receipt of the study,” Yamamoto said. “We understand the time constraint of Everest and we’re going to do everything we can to move on our end.”

Diane Tavenner, executive director of the Summit Institute, the group behind Everest, did not return several calls seeking comment.

District officials are still holding out hope that the school will accept its initial offer of a campus of portable buildings at 763 Green St. in East Palo Alto. The district offered the site in April after the state Board of Education approved Everest’s petition to open a charter, overturning earlier denials by district and county officials.

Superintendent Pat Gemma said Everest could stay for its first two years on Green Street, then eventually move to a permanent campus in East Palo Alto that the district plans

to build with bond money to house all of its charter schools.

“The advantage here to Everest is they have certainty. They know that they will be adequately housed,” Gemma said, adding that the portables will arrive on Green Street this week.

But Everest’s founders say the East Palo Alto site is inadequate, lacking facilities that other schools have such as playing field space, a career center and room for special education.

Everest says the district is forcing the school to incur \$2.3 million in costs to secure the Redwood City site, including \$939,000 in rent over three years and \$1.4 million to get the building ready.

The school filed a \$2.3 million claim against the district, which the board of trustees rejected last week. The next step is a lawsuit, though it appears Everest had not filed one as of Monday, said David Levy, a San Mateo County deputy counsel and one of the district’s attorneys.

“We’ve got a really legitimate, good, decent offer and we are still hoping that they accept it,” Levy said.

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