



CITY OF WASILLA

290 E. HERNING AVE.
WASILLA, ALASKA 99654-7091
PHONE: (907) 373-9050
FAX: (907) 373-0788

COUNCIL MEMORANDUM
NO. 92-24

FROM: Mayor Stein

DATE: February 20, 1992

SUBJECT: Headstart/School District/Old Wasilla School

The School District is still interested in use of the Old Wasilla Elementary School. The District wants to avoid double shifting next year. As Council has heard, Headstart is vigorously campaigning to keep their program in the building. The City now uses a classroom for engineering records and a storage room for Library materials. Should police become a reality some of the school space may be needed for that purpose.

It may be best for Wasilla and the Valley students to use the school for regular classes next fall. It may be more cost effective to relocate Headstart to an equal facility.

The Administration recommends that if the Council wishes to make the school available to the District that it authorize the Administration to negotiate an agreement providing that the District relocate the Headstart program to other equally functional space.

John C. Stein, Mayor
City of Wasilla

By DEBRA McGHAN
Frontiersman staff

The Wasilla Head Start program, now housed in the City Hall building, may be homeless come September if the Mat-Su School District has its way.

The district wants to put the overflow of middle school children in the former Wasilla Elementary School for at least a year.

"Wasilla Middle School parents are saying, 'Do what you have to in order to prevent double shifting.'"

— Martin Laster

But Head Start has no intention of moving without a fight.

Mary Steeby, Head Start's site coordinator, says the people in the program are very pleased with the space and would like to stay put another 20 years, maybe longer.

And Charlie Johanson, executive director of Chugiak Children's Service, which runs the Valley's Head Start programs, is angry that the school district didn't contact Head Start with the idea before approaching the Wasilla City Council.

"I think it's pretty bullish that no one (from the district) consulted us. We have 60



FRONTIERSMAN/RON CALDWELL

Kay Petal, a family educator, works with some of the 60 children at the Wasilla Head Start School.

children in the program now and another 54 kids on a waiting list," Johanson said. "We have three

full classrooms and are planning to add another two classrooms in September for sure. We can't buy

a building because that is against the regulations in the program. We don't want to lose this space."

Steeby said the building is designed for small children. The sinks, counters and bathroom

facilities are all set at a height geared toward younger children. In order for the district to use the building for middle schoolers, she says, all the fixtures would need to be remodeled.

Steeby doesn't agree the District should spend that much of the taxpayers' money for a temporary solution.

"Remodeling is expensive. And to spend that kind of money for a temporary fix is ridiculous. I think they should just wait, use

"Head Start works really well. They are non-disruptive to us, and are paying the heat and lights."

— Mayor John Stein

portables and rough it. According to the district it will only be three years maximum. Older children are more adaptable, they'll survive."

Assistant Superintendent Martin Laster asked the Wasilla City Council Monday evening to allow the school district to reclaim space in the city hall building to house overflow from Wasilla Middle School.

"I went to the city council just to see what space is available," said Laster. "Right now, there are a lot of options being discussed.

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Head Start

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This is just one idea."

Laster said it is not the intention of the district to displace anyone,

but parents of Wasilla Middle School students are pushing the district to find an alternative to double-shifting.

"Wasilla Middle School parents are saying, 'Do what you have to in order to prevent double shifting,'" said Laster. "Wasilla Elementary could give us six classrooms, enough space for 180 students."

Wasilla City Hall, originally Wasilla Elementary, is on the corner of Herning and Knik Avenue in downtown Wasilla. According to Mayor John Stein, the land has always been owned

by the City of Wasilla, but the building was originally owned by the school district. In the late 1970s, the district moved out of the building and turned the title over to the city.

Head Start, a federal program for three- and four-year-old children from low income families, took up residency in the rear part of the City Hall building four years ago. Stein said they signed a lease for an eight-year term, subject to an annual renewal clause.

"If the School District takes over they will have to buy Head Start lease," said Stein.

In addition to buying the lease, Stein said other problems would have to be worked out.

"We'll need to upgrade the

School board to address space issues

Finding space for administration offices and for middle school students are key issues for the Mat-Su Borough School Board, which meets Monday at 7:30 p.m. at Cottonwood Creek Elementary School.

Wasilla Middle School parents, concerned over the possibility of double-shifting, have asked administrators to look at a variety of solutions to the overcrowding problem. One solution would be to reclaim the space in what was once known as Wasilla Elementary.

But that solution has parents and employees of Head Start, who currently occupy the space, up in arms.

Both groups are expected to be out in force at Monday's board meeting.

For a complete copy of the agenda, check this edition of the Frontiersman or stop by the district offices at 125 W. Evergreen Street in Palmer.

building and possibly lease space across the street for parking. But I'm sure (these things) can be done."

Mayor Stein said he hasn't made a decision one way or

another on who he'd like to see occupy the space, but feels inclined to support Head Start.

"Head Start works really well. They are non-disruptive to us, and are paying the heat and lights. I

haven't heard the whole story, so I don't know what to think. But I have to admit my predisposition is toward the status quo. If we do give the building back, we'll be short on space ourselves."

Stein said another possible option would be to work out an agreement that would give the entire building back to the school district, with the city moving elsewhere. But "that might just be a pie in the sky," said Stein.

Laster said the district has always supported Head Start.

"We have provided them space in Colony High and Butte Elementary for the Palmer Head Start program. We're not trying to displace them, but right now we have constituents saying, 'we're deeply concerned about double

shifting.' We are just trying to pursue every possible solution. Everyone needs to make tough decisions."

Johanson, from Head Start said she understands the district's position, but also feels her program is providing more than just a preschool to the Valley.

"We're serving families and children," she said. "I think Head Start is one of the most positive things going for the community."

President George Bush expressed his support for the Head Start program in his State of the Union address and by requesting \$2.8 billion for the program in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, a \$600 million increase from the current year.