

Hightower To Remain Open, Board Rescinds Closing Order

By HELEN ORDNER

Hightower Elementary School got a reprieve Monday night from its closing, slated at the end of the school year.

Board of Education members, in a 5/2 vote, rescinded their earlier decision to close the school.

At a prior session Superintendent Robert Freeman had withdrawn his recommendation to close Shallowford, leaving only Skyland remaining on the list to be closed. Parents from that school have scheduled an appeal from the decision to be heard at 5 p.m. Monday, April 16.

Hightower parents were told, following their appeal presented at 6:30 p.m., that they would have an answer within 15 days.

At the business meeting following, however, Paul Womack moved to rescind the motion to close, saying "at this time, we know things we did not know then."

Hightower attorney Ed Carter, in his appeal, said that a housing boom in the Hightower area had not been taken into consideration. Figures presented by the school staff showed a projection of 238 new housings units, but

Carter's projections added Franklin properties, slated to include 480 units, and a development by Phil Lundy, to include 390 to 423 units. DeKalb Zoning Commissioners were to vote Tuesday on the Lundy property.

"This is a factor that throws out of kilter projections you relied on in making your decision," Carter said.

He also protested that one school in Doraville has already been closed.

Parents pointed out again that school board action last year, in transferring some children, had recognized Peachtree Industrial-Tilly Mill as a dangerous intersection. Closing Hightower would have meant even more children taking that route to school.

One proposal would have routed children crossing through the Chesnut attendance area, a procedure that school officials presented as undesirable in the Redan court hearing.

Board member Phil McGregor voted against rescind-

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Hightower

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ing the order to close Hightower, saying that the appeal had been heard only hours ago and that these actions "contaminate" that process. Frank Jernigan abstained from voting, stating that he did not have adequate information.

Superintendent Robert Freeman said, prior to the board's vote, that he still stood by his recommendation to close Hightower, but he added later that "this is the democratic process."

COMPTROLLER Ralph Dodson told board members that the current year's budget, "if not completely balanced, will be almost." Tax receipts are up \$2.5 million to \$3 million more than had been budgeted, he said.

Textbooks and supplementary materials were adopted for foreign language, art, music, health, physical

education, science, driver education, computer literacy and English as a second language. These followed the recommendation of classroom teachers.

A boundary line change was passed, moving 117 students from Knollwood Elementary, where portable classrooms are now in use, to Hooper Alexander.

A bid of \$149,480 was accepted to remove asbestos from Sky Haven, Leslie J. Steele, Tilson, Kelley Lake, Snapfinger, Columbia Elementary, Clifton, Walker, Southwest DeKalb, Stoneview, and Lithonia.

Board members adopted a proposal from Dr. Ruel Morrison which requires third graders, starting in 1986, to meet prescribed test standards in order to be promoted to fourth grade. This brings DeKalb County in line with state requirements, Dr. Morrison said. A brochure is being prepared to explain the new standards to parents.

Board members indicated support of a remedial summer program for second and third graders, but deferred any action on that until a budget is established.

Residents Petition City On School Closing

By Leslie Nichols-Ring

Neighbor Staff Writer

A Doraville resident whose child attends the soon-to-be-closed Hightower Elementary School has asked the city council to help with the Hightower PTA's effort to keep the school operating.

Dr. Doug Wiest asked individual city council members to send letters and encourage Doraville citizens to send additional letters to school board members, who voted March 12 to close Hightower and Skyland elementaries in north Dekalb.

Wiest hopes to have at least 75 letters from Doraville residents and wants them sent to board members Lyman Howard, Phil McGregor and David Williamson, who represent three votes which would be needed to change the decision. Board members Norma Travis and Paul Womack already voted against the closing of Hightower. The school parents believe those three votes would be assured if the vote were to be taken again.

Hightower's parents have filed for a hearing, of which city council member Forrest Fleming said "they (the school board) will have

to give it to us."

Fleming also said, "developers have been wandering through the neighborhoods around Hightower since the proposed closings were originally announced. They have been asking people if they were interested in selling their property. Understandably this has discouraged a lot of people about the school remaining open."

Fleming, who has been vocally opposed to the closing of the Doraville facility, said board decisions last year to reduce the school's enrollment led to the contention by Superintendent Robert

Freeman Hightower was under capacity. "Last year the school board told us how wonderful a small school is when they took many of our students out of Hightower," Fleming said. "Then this year they turn around and close us down because we are too small."

Wiest told the March 19 city council meeting, "Everytime we asked him (Freeman), why close Hightower, he answered, (that) three area schools had to be closed. It just had to be Hightower." Wiest added, "He just never told us, why Hightower, except the school is 10 years old."

WENESDAY, MARCH 28, 1984

4-18-84 DeKalb Neighbor

DeKalb Board Changes Mind On Hightower Elementary

By Wendy Parker
Neighbor Staff Writer

The DeKalb Board of Education has reversed its March decision to close Hightower Elementary School, with the Doraville school staying open until the matter is reconsidered in January 1985.

School board member Paul Womack reflected the claims of various people in the Hightower community who believed the possibility of residential growth in the area was not anticipated by the school staff when it made its 1984-85 enrollment projections, and moved to rescind the closing.

The school board moved to close Hightower and Skyland Elementary in February upon the recommendations by superintendent Robert Freeman, who cited declining enrollment as major factors.

Supporters of the school were visibly pleased by the reversal. "I'm just delighted," remarked Hightower principal Forrest Sewell. "I think wiser heads prevailed." Doraville city council member

Forrest Fleming has been a prime figure in the move to keep Hightower open. The reversal, he said, indicates to the community "there is compassion on the school board."

"I think it calmed the community down," he said. "We felt we were losing the community concept of the schools." He added that rezoning and development interests near schools has piqued the community to become more knowledgeable about surrounding issues that have effects on schools.

Ed Carter, Doraville city attorney and Hightower parents' representative, cited two recent rezoning matters along Winters Chapel Road which could increase the potential number of students flowing into the Hightower district. A 40-acre tract of land was rezoned in February by the county commission for multi-housing development, which Carter contends could lead to 480 new housing units.

Another decision by the commission April 10 rezoned 35 acres, also along Winters Chapel Road, for

residential dwelling, a possible addition of between 390 to 423 units in all, Carter claimed.

"This shows that there is a need for residential housing," he continued. "Other residential sources in the area also may exist as well."

Womack, David Williamson, chairwoman Elizabeth Andrews, Norma Travis and Lyman Howard voted to rescind the Hightower closing. School board member Phil McGregor opposed, and vice-chairman Frank Jernigan abstained, saying he needed more time to study the appeal.

Freeman said he had anticipated a move against the Hightower closing, but sticks by his suggestion.

"We'll see what the school year brings, but I want to make this recommendation work," he said. "I felt a sentiment would go this way," in reference to school board action to take back its earlier decision.

The Hightower reversal April 9 does not affect the status of Skyland Elementary near Cross Keys High School, for which an appeal hearing

was held Monday.

Nor does it involve the proposed closing of Shallowford Elementary School. The school board held off action until a rezoning impact of nearby Dunwoody Elementary could be determined. If closed, Shallowford would send a majority of its students to Dunwoody, which is adjacent to 72 acres recently rezoned by the DeKalb County commission to high-density commercial and residential classifications.

Womack later denied allegations that he had forged an alliance with supporters of Kingsley and Chesnut Elementaries. "This was done for the benefit of Hightower only," he said. Most of Hightower's 300 students would be transferred to those schools, with proposals also made to bus some Chesnut students to Kingsley and to redraw the two school districts.

During an appeal hearing directly before the April 9 business meeting, Hightower supporters said the school board would do "irreparable damage" if it held by its decision to

bus the former Hightower students across busy Peachtree Industrial Boulevard to their new schools.

"Give us a year to make a reasonable study," Carter said. "Don't make our children cross Peachtree Industrial."

McGregor opposed Womack's original motion to reconsider the Hightower closing. "We're already considering it. Why do we need a motion?" he asked. By state law, school board officials are required to take any reconsideration action within 15 days of an appeal.

Womack then amended his motion to call for rescinding the Hightower closing. "I don't have the heart to see Hightower, Chesnut and Kingsley people dangling on a string," he said.

Fleming said Hightower supporters were surprised "but grateful" to Womack for his motion to rescind. "We were expecting the school board to reconsider within the 15 day period," he said, adding that Womack had not discussed the proposal to them prior to the action.