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The Value of a Neighborhood School: The Story of Paxson Elementary, Missoula, Montana

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THE VALUE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL: THE STORY OF PAXSON

ELEMENTARY, MISSOULA, MONTANA

By

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   The planning, management and administration of public schools in the United States has been largely ignored by professional planners. School siting issues rarely involve an urban planner's perspective. In recent years there has been an increase in community participation in planning issues and planners have come to realize that people have valuable perspectives concerning issues of community design. Planners are beginning to take note of what has long been portrayed by environmental psychologists: people's attachment to place is important to their engagement in their community. The complexity of community planning is such that the planners need to draw upon various fields to create a holistic approach to planning and development. Manzo and Perkins (2006) developed a framework for community planning and development at various scales based upon multiple environmental domains . In large part, this framework is based on place-based relationships.

   Paxson Elementary School is located in Missoula, Montana. During the 1991-1992 school year, the school was completely torn down and rebuilt. The school is the closest elementary school to the University of Montana and serves approximately 350 children in kindergarten through the fifth grade. The rebuilding of Paxson School was a neighborhood driven effort in that residents really pushed for the district to keep the school in their neighborhood.

   This qualitative study investigates the perceived value of this school to its neighborhood. In-depth interviews with twelve neighborhood residents, including parents of students enrolled at the school during the period of the rebuild as well as other involved residents, were used to uncover the story of Paxson School. Through content analysis, it became clear that the school was valued highly by neighborhood residents and represented an important part of their sense of neighborhood identity. An additional six interviews, conducted with school officials, provided additional insight into the value of the school to this particular neighborhood. Paxson School was valued not only by the parents in the area, but it was valued by neighborhood residents as well. An additional six interviews, with newer neighborhood residents, support the claim that the school is still valued by the neighborhood.

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INTRODUCTION

"My favorite memory is when I entered Paxson (the old one) for the first time." Arwen[i]

In the late 1980s, Missoula Schools faced a problem: one they referred to as the "Paxson Problem." The building was no longer up to code for kindergarten and first grade standards, and the population was spilling into the modular classrooms set up on the playground. A few years later, a brand new school building stood at the site of the old Paxson School. The new school was the result of a neighborhood mobilization effort. Using a qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews with neighborhood residents, the following research objectives were examined:

1. Uncover the story of Paxson School and its rebuild;

2. Explore how residents of the neighborhood perceived the value of the school leading up to the rebuild, and how residents perceive the value of the school to the neighborhood today;

3. Examine how the situation with Paxson School compares to schools in other areas of Missoula that ultimately under went closure.

School boards today are often faced with school closure or school consolidation issues for many reasons, including demographic changes in the area. School siting issues are a large part of school development, however it is unusual for a school to be rebuilt on the same site, as was the case with Paxson School. After a period of considerable debate and neighborhood involvement, the school was completely torn down and replaced with a larger building.

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[i] Quote from the 1993 class of Paxson fifth graders (Paxson School 1993). Other quotes at start of each chapter are from the same source.

As the City of Missoula, Montana, developed, its residents requested schools be built in their own neighborhoods. The schools Missoula built have been rebuilt on occasion, and some have closed, but with exception of the earliest of Missoula schools, none have been torn down. The buildings remain as educational spaces today, whether they house private schools, an early educational program, or a church. Like many other American cities, Missoula went through phases of building new schools, rebuilding schools, building more schools, and then closing schools. In the past twenty years, Missoula has closed four schools, rebuilt one, and built one entirely new school.

Today, new schools are built in response to the growth of the city. As the city spreads, there is a point, economically, where it is generally cheaper to build new schools in new neighborhoods and areas receiving growth, than it is to bus children across the city to various existing schools. The reverse can be said in the case of a school closing: it is generally cheaper to bus children out of the area than to enlarge or rebuild existing schools. Historically, schools were rebuilt due to the increasing availability of superior building materials, such as brick, which was able to withstand fire. Interestingly the City of Missoula rebuilt Paxson School, originally constructed of brick in 1922, in 1992. This study investigates the role of the school in residents' perceptions of the neighborhood and motivations of neighborhood residents' involvement in the rebuilding effort.

 This neighborhood-based approach and study of one neighborhood school will add to current research focused on neighborhood development and contribute to the link between the neighborhood and the school district. It will be useful not only to residents in the Paxson School Neighborhood and students at Paxson school, as they will have a better understanding of the history of their school, but also to school officials both in

Missoula and elsewhere who might face this same issue in the future. Furthermore, this research will be of use to city planners that are working on developing or redeveloping neighborhoods and planning neighborhood schools.

Because the school remained in the neighborhood, this research may be helpful to other neighborhoods facing the loss of their school. Using Paxson School's story as a model, other neighborhoods may be able to keep their schools through rebuilding as well. Additionally, this research will be useful in helping school districts recognize the value of neighborhood schools to the area residents.

This study will examine one neighborhood whose mobilization effort was successful and attempt to determine individual motivations for mobilizing and examine the underlying role of the neighborhood school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section of the thesis will tie the current study into the present body of literature. As the field of planning draws from many disciplines, so too will this literature review draw from psychology, sociology and geography. First it is necessary to define terms such as neighborhood and place before engaging in a more complex discussion of place identity. Once place identity is developed, people can mobilize for a cause with greater success. The Paxson School Neighborhood mobilized to keep its school in the neighborhood. The success of community mobilization efforts will be discussed, drawing largely from Tarrow (1994), in terms of social capital and political opportunity structure. This section then circles back to discuss the relationship, or lack thereof, between community planning and planning for education. This study adds to the abundant literature on place attachment and neighborhood identity, and adds to the small body of literature on the relationship between planning and school siting issues.

Neighborhood, Place and Community

Everyone has a neighborhood. In terms of physical space, a neighborhood is often defined as an "urban residential area." But to geographers, it is more. A neighborhood is a *place*. A place is the "site where a recursive process involving human agency, structure and environment unfolds" (Myers et al. 2003, 85). A place implies a relationship between the space and the humans that occupy it and it is human feelings and emotional attachment to place that give meaning to an area (Tuan 1976). Indeed, many believe a common identity is achieved through common experiences, interests and values that are reinforced by being or residing in a place. This idea of a common identity of a place can

be traced in urban sociology to the 1920s (McKenzie 1925; Park 1925). Since then, scholars in geography (Tuan 1974; Pred 1984; Purcell 1997; Jonas 1998) have continued the study of place and identity, acknowledging the new question of *how* common identity is established and various terms have arisen including "common identity," "place identity," and "community identity."

There is a distinction between neighborhood and community. Neighborhood exists for all, while community may not. The distinction is that a neighborhood is a physical place and community is a social aspect of that place (Cuba and Hummon 1993). A community is the social aspect of an area, and while there are loose geographic boundaries, a community is built upon relationships people have with one another in a place. Thus, by living in a neighborhood, one may identify with values neighborhood residents promote without becoming a member of the social community. Place identity can exist for individuals without community identity. However, place identity is strengthened by involved residents who share common experiences and activities and a community identity. Because of the different meanings behind neighborhood and community, this study will use the term "place identity" to mean the identity of the neighborhood.

Place Identity

The study of place identity crosses many disciplines from sociology to geography to psychology. Building on the work from early Chicago style sociologists, scholars have taken many approaches to place identity. The psycologists Proshansky, Favian and Kaminoff (1983, 60) wrote that place identity is a "pot-pourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types

of settings." It is of oneself and individualistic. It is an aspect of identity that is

comparable to social identity. Korpela (1989) defined place identity as a psychological

construct, arising out of an individual's attempt to regulate their environment. As part of

the psyche, a sense of belonging acts as the foundation for place identity (Korpela 1989).

Belonging to a place, and a home, is important to the development of place identity

(Cuba and Hummon 1993; Fried 2000). While there is little argument about the human

need for belonging, the individualistic nature of place identity as proposed by Proshansky

et al. (1983) and Korpela (1989) has come into question. Group-based identification with

place through relations between persons, identities and material settings seems to

promote a collective and social nature of place identity (Bonaiuto, Breakwell, and Cano

1996; Devine-Wright and Lyons 1997). Dixon and Durrheim (2000, 40) suggest that

place identity is a "collective construction, produced and modified through human

dialogue, that allows people to make sense of their locatedness."

Although the development of place identity is not fully understood, there are four

characteristics of individuals that seem to be factors (Cuba and Hummon 1993). Social

involvements, in the form of friends and organizational membership, promote emotional

ties to local places. Long-term residence also contributes to place identity as it creates

sentimental attachment and strengthens local social ties (Sampson 1988). The third

characteristic involves the complex relationship between place and life cycle. Research

suggests that older residents place greater importance on their homes as they become

increasingly prominent in their lives (Rowles 1978; Rubenstein 1990). Sampson (1988)

found the strongest predictor of community attachment to be the age of residents, with

older residents being more attached to their communities. The last characteristic that

impacts place identification is the individual's role in greater society. Traditional gender roles, for instance, may play a yet undefined role in the development of place identity. While gender is not believed to impact the strength of place attachment, it may impact the meaning of the place, particularly at small scales such as home and neighborhood (Krupat 1985).

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) studied the role of place in relation to the residential environment. Results of their study in England show that people with an attachment to their local environment reference their local environment differently than unattached individuals. Attached individuals will identify with their local environment, whereas unattached individuals will not have local place identifications. The study had an implied disruption of place inherent in the design, as they purposefully selected participants that had moved into the area. The authors note that further research into the relationship between the physical environment and place identity is called for, specifically research into what changes in local environments are perceived as a threat to the local identity of residents. Gotham (1999) approached place identity as an outcome, rather than as a point of departure in a neighborhood. He found that identity could "manifest itself in a variety of ways and arise in response to a number of perceived threats including urban renewal and neighborhood racial transition" (1999, 334). The threat of change coming from the outside can unite a neighborhood. This could be seen through local political action, mobilization or organization of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Mobilization

Community mobilization is a grassroots effort of community groups to gain power. It often occurs in response to decisions by units of government that have ignored

or ineffectively included the public. The majority of research on community mobilization has focused on marginalized or underprivileged groups that become empowered. Much of the research uses a framework of study developed by Castells (1983). Castells studied the relationship between the citizen and the city and found that there were three core themes of social movements: collective consumption, defense of cultural-territorial identity, and local government as a target for political mobilization. Castells' second theme, defense of cultural-territorial identity, can be applied to neighborhoods that organize against outside influences. They are defending their places and in essence, their identities as neighborhoods.

The neighborhood forms a basis for social cohesion and place identity. Residents often come together in '"block clubs, neighborhood groups, and other associations that have place-related use values" to maintain their sense of home and neighborhood (Logan and Molotch 1987, 37). In Smith's (1985, 431) study of neighborhood identity, she found that "activism engenders a sense of place that is absent among non-activist populations. Suttles (1968, as cited in Gotham 1999) found that place-based unity is a greater determinant of mobilization than ethnic or racial unity. A place-based unity can come from within the neighborhood, or be pressed upon the neighborhood from outsiders (Forrest and Kearns 2001). The geographer Martin (2003) developed the term "place-frames" to study the relationship between activism based around the neighborhood unit. She says, "place-frames conceptually identify [the] relationship between place and activism by situating activism in place and defining a collective identity in terms of the common place that people - mostly neighborhood residents - share" (2003, 733). Place-framing is a tool that can be used by neighborhood leaders, and planners, to impress the

meaning of place upon residents and motivate them to act in their own interest (Martin 2003; O'Hara 2004). The success of neighborhood mobilization has been studied by Tarrow (1994). He explored why some neighborhood efforts are successful and others are not, and identified two factors that play a large role in the success of neighborhood movements. Social capital within the neighborhood and the political opportunity structure in which the mobilization occurs highly influence the outcome of neighborhood mobilizations (Tarrow 1994).

Social Capital

Putnam (1993, 35) defines social capital as "the features of social organization such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit." With a reemerging focus on the neighborhood and community-scale activities, social capital becomes increasingly important. Forrest and Kearns (2001) outline what they refer to as the domains of social capital at the neighborhood level. The domains (seen in Table 1) work from the bottom up in that the domain of safety must be met before the next domain, trust, can be achieved. The goal of social capital is empowerment (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Mayer 2003). Using existing social organizations, social capital can be built and further strengthened, resulting in an empowered community.

Table 1: Domains of social capital at the neighborhood level as developed by Forrest and Kearns 2001.

Domain	Description	Local Policies
Empowerment	People are involved, feel that their voice is heard, and can take steps toward change	Local people are given a role in the policy process and a voice in decisions
Participation	People are involved in social and community activities; local events are well attended	Support for local activities and organizations
Associational activity and common purpose	Cooperation of individuals through formal and informal groups; people work together for further their interests	Developing and supporting organizational networks
Supporting networks and reciprocity	Cooperation of individuals and organizations for mutual or one-sided gain; help is given to or received from others when needed	Support cooperation between individuals and organizations; good neighbor award schemes
Collective norms and values	People have similar values and norms of behavior	Promoting community interests
Trust	Mutual feeling of trust in other residents and local organizations	Encouraging trust in residents; promises are kept; conflicting groups are brought together
Safety	People feel safe in their neighborhood	Encouraging sense of safety; providing visible evidence of security measures
Belonging	People feel connected to co-residents, their home and have a sense of belonging to the place and its people	Creating, developing and/ or supporting a sense of belonging in residents

A community that is empowered may act and mobilize depending on the political opportunity structure. On the other hand, a mobilized group can further its own power by aligning with stronger players, particularly those in government (Tarrow 1994) Relationship with power players is defined through political opportunity structure.

Political Opportunity Structure

Political opportunity structure refers to the structures that bound changes and political actions. These can be governmental structures, public policies or simply the condition of politics in the area (Gotham 1999). Opportunities in the political structure are often attached to changes in power. Tarrow (1994) identified four events that strengthen the likelihood of a successful group mobilization. *Participants' access to power needs to be increased*, thus resulting in a somewhat more empowered group. Secondly, *unstable alignments* among political allies are likely to result in a influential change from opposing groups. Social capital of the group can create *influential allies* and groups with these influential allies are more likely to take action. Finally, if the political structure has *divided elites*, mobilized groups are likely to be successful in their action if they can deepen the rift by putting one against the other. Individually, each one of these factors can indicate the group is preparing for mobilization. However, if all the factors are present, the mobilization effort is likely to be successful (Tarrow 1994).

From a community planning standpoint, it is important to understand how various forms of capital (social, political, etc.) affect each other on various scales. Manzo and Perkins (2006) developed a framework that considers four forms of capital and four scales of planning. This framework can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Forms of capital at various scales as developed by Manzo and Perkins 2006.

	Physical	**Social**	**Political**	**Economic**
Individual	Place attachment/ identity; residential pride	Sense of community; community attachment and identity; neighboring behavior	Citizen participation; empowerment	Personal monetary investments
Social group/ organization	Residential associations	Mutual assistance; social cohesion	Empowered organization; participation	Fundraising; resource sharing;
Neighborhood	Community physical conditions	Informal social networks	Power of community organization in neighborhood; external connections; representation	Private investment/ disinvestment; public investment
City/ region/ society	Urban growth/ sprawl; transportation systems	Social services; demographic diversity	Local, state, federal agencies; political institutions	Housing and economic development policies at various scales

This framework encompasses both Tarrow's political opportunity structure and the social capital domains discussed by Forrest and Kearns. Each scale builds upon the scale before, thus, for organizations to be mobilized, they must have individuals that are attached to place, have a sense of community, feel empowered and make personal investments. At the neighborhood-scale, the neighborhood is only as good and as effective at mobilizing as its components: the individuals and organizations. Neighborhood-scale movements, however, can have an important impact on the community, both in terms of general community planning, and, especially in the case

examined which resulted in a school district's approval of a new elementary school building, in terms of school district planning.

Planning and Education

Community planning should take into account residents' involvement in their community, which Manzo and Perkins (2006) have shown to be rooted in their relationships to place (Manzo and Perkins 2006; Smith 1985). For Manzo and Perkins (2006) place identity occurs at the scale of the individual, but neighborhoods have their own place identity as well (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Martin 2003). The relationship between elements in a neighborhood and scale of those elements has been studied under the emerging field of new urbanism. New Urbanists design neighborhoods to be on a human scale with easy access to community centers and schools. Indeed, schools are an integral part of many neighborhoods (Ehrenhalt 1996; Ewing 1996). Community residents, however, are not often included in school siting decisions as public education falls under jurisdiction of the state rather than the city or even the community. Although some studies show that neighborhood characteristics influence educational outcomes (Ainsworth 2002; Wilson 1997), school boards often do not take those factors into consideration when planning to build new schools, to expand schools, to consolidate schools, or to close schools. There is a disconnect between school boards and planners, and with school districts having a great influence over land use with school siting and school closures it is important that to bridge the gap between educational governance and land use planning.

There has been little planning research addressing education or school siting although it is a relevant issue, especially in small communities. Planners have little

knowledge about educational governance, and educational leaders often have sparse knowledge of planning issues. Community participation is frequently overlooked in school siting decisions and school closures. The school districts get the final say and often do not involve the public in any great capacity.

The influence of the community in educational decisions has not been much studied in the context of community mobilization either. As an urban planner, O'Hara (2004) looked at the influence of communities on school siting decisions in Los Angles. While she found that the existing political structure and the lack of opposition from community members proved to be a greater influence in school siting decisions than community mobilization, that may not always be the case. Witten et al. (2001) found that schools promote community participation and social cohesion. In studying an area of New Zealand that was affected by a school closure, she found that the area suffered from a loss of neighborhood cohesion and a loss of social contact. The school served as a center of identity for the community. Neighborhoods and communities that understand the role of the school and believe it to be an important part of their identity as a neighborhood may mobilize in an effort to save their school from closure and thus protect their identity as a neighborhood. This study will examine one neighborhood whose mobilization effort was successful and attempt to determine individual motivations for mobilizing and examine the underlying role of the neighborhood school.

Conclusion

This review of the current literature shows that seemingly simple issues such as neighborhood mobilization to save a valued resource can be quite complex in that they can be grounded in issues of place identity, and the various forms of capital (physical,

social, political and economic). This study explores these issues through examining one neighborhood whose mobilization effort was successful. The following sections outline the study area, the methodological approach and the results of interviews with residents. Content analysis of interviews yielded individual motivations for becoming involved in the rebuilding of Paxson School. A goal of this research was to examine the underlying role of the neighborhood school, which is discussed in the final sections.

STUDY AREA

"I loved Paxson! And I love the new school!" Jessie

The City of Missoula is nestled in the Rocky Mountains of Western Montana. The city is home to the University of Montana. Paxson School is located within close proximity to the University and within the Paxson School Neighborhood there are smaller neighborhoods such as those around a park. In general, however, the term neighborhood will be focused on the school oriented neighborhood. Paxson School was chosen because the school is the only one in Missoula to have been rebuilt in recent years.

In November 1990, a school bond election passed in Missoula, Montana with 11,301 favorable votes against 8,653 votes. This bond provided money to rebuild Paxson Elementary School. The U.S. Census of 1990 estimated Missoula's population to be 42,918. County-wide, there were about 10,000 students enrolled in Missoula County Public Schools, with an estimated 7,000 students within the City of Missoula (Missoula School District, pers. comm.).

The City of Missoula hadn't built a school, or rebuilt a school, since the 1960s when C. S. Porter and Meadow Hill Schools were built. The first school in Missoula was built on the corner of Main and Adams in 1873. This was later named Central School. It was rebuilt in 1884, and again in 1935. Many of Missoula's early schools were rebuilt for two reasons: to protect against fire (frame schools were replaced with brick), and to accommodate a larger student population. Lowell was rebuilt in 1909, Hawthorne in 1911, Franklin in 1916 and both Whittier and Willard in 1922 (Browman n.d.). In fact,

the same plan used to rebuild Whittier and Willard was used to build the original Paxson

School in 1922 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sketch of original Paxson School in 1930, found in Paxson School Library
archive.

Missoula's growth can be mapped through the building and re-building of

schools. Central School, as mentioned above was the first school in Missoula. By 1900,

four other schools had been built: Westside, Northside, Southside and Eastside (listed in

the order they were built). Two additional schools built in 1901 brought the total to seven

schools in Missoula. Browman (n.d.) said these schools were built because people wanted

a school in their neighborhood and close to them: they didn't want their children to have

to travel far to school. When mapped along with land plats, it is possible to see the

direction of growth in Missoula (Figure 2). Schools continued to be built to the south and

west into the 1960s. In the 1980s, however, schools began closing. Demographic shifts

and changes resulted in neighborhood populations unable to support schools in the central area, and what has become, the central business district of Missoula. Central School was the first school to close in 1980, Jefferson and Whittier closed in 1985 and Willard closed in 1990. A timeline for Missoula Schools can be found in Appendix A. Figure 3 shows the open schools in green and the closed schools in red. The pattern of closed schools almost forms a path through the center of Missoula. If the high schools were removed from the map, the path would be even more evident, with Emma Dickinson School being the only outlier.
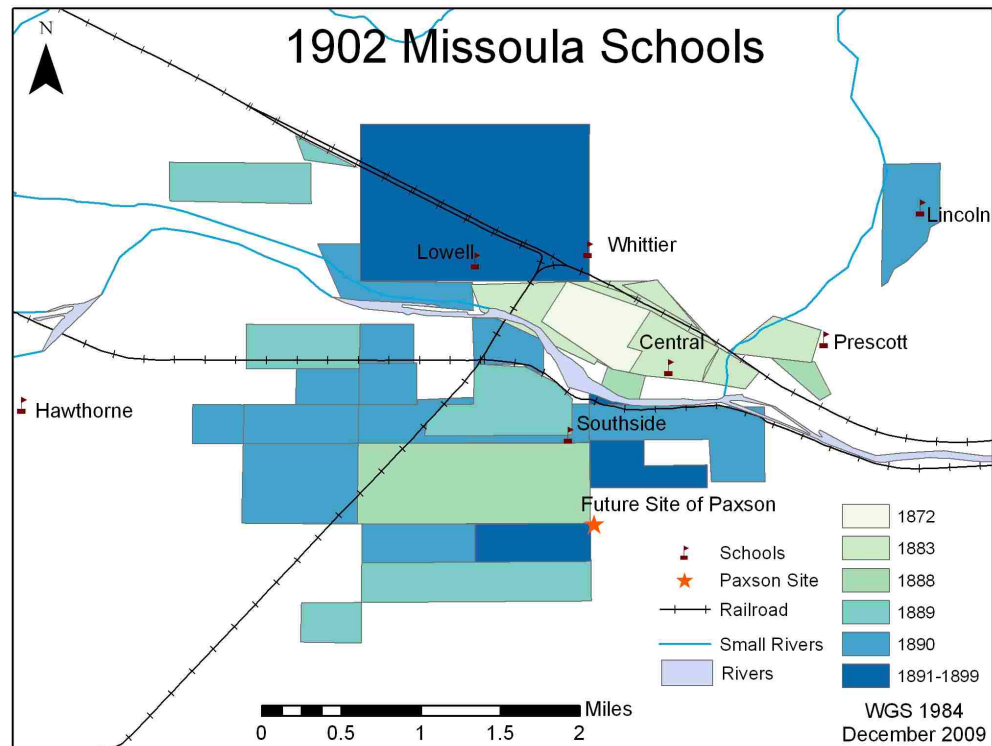
Figure 2: Missoula Schools in 1902 with platted land additions to the city by year.

Of the original five schools in Missoula, Lowell is the only one still operating as a public school. While Missoula Schools began with first through eighth grades, the public schools switched to a Middle School system for grades 6 - 8 in 1987. Paxson School, is the forth oldest school in Missoula that is still operating as a public school (Hawthorne

and Franklin are second and third). Paxson is located in the University District of Missoula.
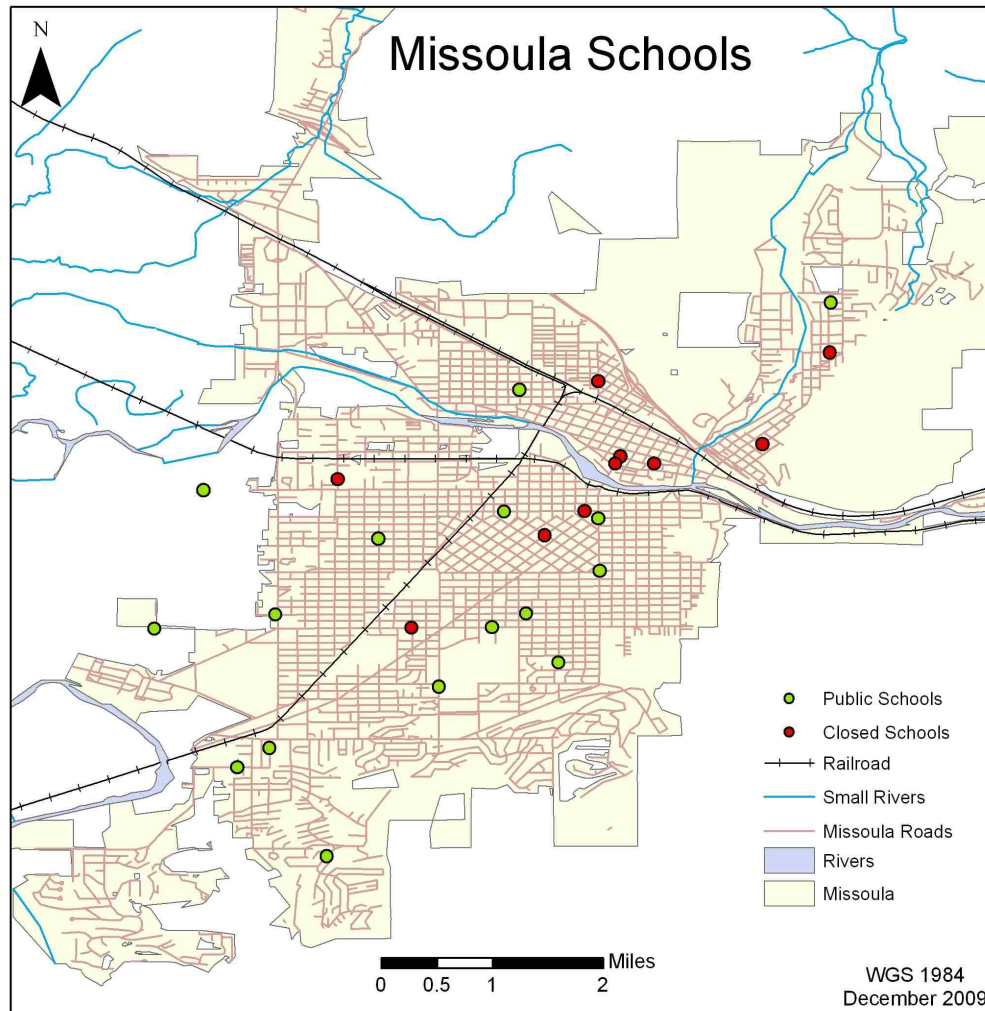
Figure 3: Missoula Public Schools.

The University District, in this study, was defined as the area bounded by Higgins Avenue, the Clark Fork River, Mount Sentinel and South Avenue. This area was used because children from this neighborhood have been included in the Paxson School boundary since the school was built in 1922; it is the traditional Paxson School Neighborhood and historically linked to the school. Other areas have been added, since 1922, to the Paxson boundary that now send children to Paxson. Residents from this area

were asked to participate in this study, and an effort was made to obtain a geographically

distributed sample of interviews as is shown in Figure 4.
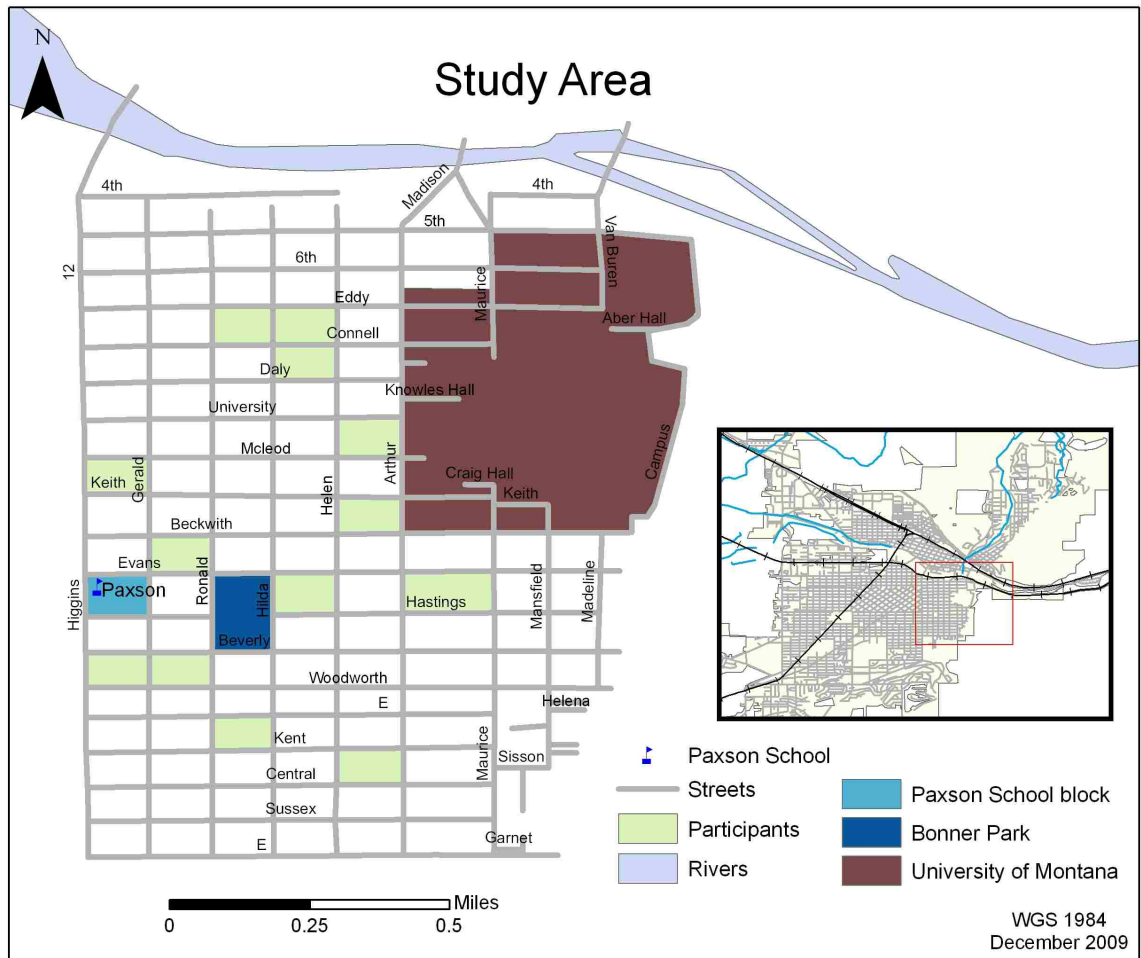
Figure 4: Study area of Paxson School Neighborhood.

U.S. Census (1990) data show, the University District housed close to 6,000

people with about 1,830 households. Approximately 45 percent of the homes were

owner- occupied and the median home value was $74,425, which is greater than the

$64,500 median home value for Missoula. The majority, 94 percent, of the neighborhood

was white. Over half, 56 percent, of adults over 25 had some college degree, which is

higher than Missoula's 39%. The neighborhood median household income in 1989 was

$27,861.25 compared to Missoula's median income of $21,033. Additionally, 88% of the

school aged children (K-12) attended public school, which is less than the 95% for all of Missoula. This indicates that a smaller proportion of neighborhood children actually attended Paxson School when compared to schools across the district.

Today, the neighborhood looks like a residential neighborhood with wide tree-lined streets with sidewalks and houses that are set back from the road with porches in the front and alley-ways in the back. There is a variety of housing in the area from single-family homes to apartments and student housing. Additionally, there are a few commercial buildings in the neighborhood, two public schools (one elementary and one high school), and several churches.

METHODOLOGY

"My best memory was when Kathy York let us paint on the old Paxson walls, and getting to go to this school for 6 straight years." Bromley

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived value of a neighborhood school to the residents of the neighborhood. This study explored a single neighborhood and neighborhood elementary school that had been completely rebuilt on site during the 1991-1992 school year. The rebuilding of the school would seem to indicate that the school had some value to the neighborhood, however, this study explored the reasons behind the rebuild. In other words, was the school's value to the neighborhood a primary cause for rebuilding? And can this rebuild be a model for other communities and neighborhoods?

A qualitative methodology was chosen as this was an exploratory study, designed in part to uncover the "story" of the rebuilding of Paxson Elementary School. The methods employed in this study include archival research and in-depth interviews, which were used to assess the perceived value of the school by neighborhood residents. Archival research in the form of newspaper articles, School Board minutes, newsletters, photographs, and a charrette booklet aided the development of interview questions, and also served as a means of data triangulation. Data triangulation is "central to ensuring the quality of field research" (Bailey 2007, 76). Triangulation from various sources can be used to check the consistency of data (Patton 2002). In this study, triangulation was particularly important because this study asked individuals about an incident many years in the past. Archival research was used to verify and fill in missing data in the recollections of the rebuild, thus developing a consistent story at the same time as

ensuring quality research. Quality qualitative research "blends conceptualization with sufficient descriptive detail to allow the reader to reach his or her own conclusions about the data and to judge the credibility of the researcher's data and analysis" (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 302).

Archival Research

Archival research was used to better understand the atmosphere of the school, the neighborhood, and Missoula in the years leading up to the rebuild. Missoulian (Missoula's daily newspaper) articles and School Board minutes were used to better understand the School District's stance on Paxson. Missoulian articles containing discussions of Paxson School from 1985 to 1992 were compiled and studied. School Board minutes were studied for discussion of Paxson and the "Paxson Problem" as it was referred to by Board Members. Analysis of School Board minutes included the years of 1989, when the district began planning for a school closure that would redraw the Paxson School boundary, through 1992 and the opening of the new Paxson School. Newsletters from Paxson School and photographs of the demolition were also studied. A charrette booklet outlining the options for Paxson Elementary and the response of the neighborhood to those options was also examined.

These documents provided the details of the rebuild and allowed for the development of a more complete picture of the rebuild process than can be discovered through the use of interviews alone. The two methods used complement each other and support a higher quality of data (Patton 2002).

In-Depth Interviews

Sampling

The study population was composed of residents in the Paxson Elementary School neighborhood and school officials. The study area is only a part of the area that feeds students into Paxson Elementary School, however, it is an older part of the school's contributing area and has traditionally fed into Paxson, where as the current Paxson School boundary is larger, composed of areas that were not part of the contributing area at the time of the rebuild.

Three groups of people were interviewed in this study. The first group was composed of area residents who had children at Paxson School at the time of the rebuild, or area residents who were active in the rebuild process. This group will be referred to as *long-time residents* of the neighborhood. The second group was composed of school administrators, school board members, and teachers at Paxson School at the time of the rebuild. This group will be referred to as *school officials*. Members of this group were not necessarily residents of the neighborhood and thus provided an outside view of the rebuild and were also able to compare this case with other neighborhood school situations. It is important to note, however, that two participants in the school officials group were residents of the neighborhood, however only one identifies herself as active in the rebuild process and thus qualifies as a member of the long-time residents group as well. A third group consisted of neighborhood residents that moved to the area after the decision was made to rebuild, and in some cases, after the school was actually rebuilt. This group will be referred to as *newer residents*.

A purposive sample was used to select initial participants for in-depth interviews. Two long-time residents were identified through their involvement with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the years leading up to the rebuild. Two school officials were identified through contact with Paxson School and an examination of School Board minutes. There were no initial participants identified for the newer residents group. Snowball sampling was used to identify other potential participants for in-depth interviews. Snowball sampling, sometimes referred to as chain sampling, "selects cases from referrals by participants" (Bailey 2007, 65; Patton 1990, 182). At the end of these first interviews, and continuing throughout the sample, participants were asked to identify other potential participants that met the criteria of being involved with the rebuild, or had moved to the area since the rebuild. From the identified potential participants for the long-time residents group, further participants were purposefully selected based upon their involvement in the rebuild, as perceived by the interviewees, or for the fact that they may have different views or provide different prospectives concerning the rebuild.

Interviews continued until saturation of the groups was reached. Saturation occurred when no new information was produced during the interviews. Twenty-three potential participants were contacted for this study, and all agreed to participate in the interview. Interviews were conducted beginning in December 2008 through May 2009. The long-time residents group was composed of twelve participants; the school officials and the newer residents groups were each composed of six participants. Table 3 shows the residents belonging to each group. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Table 3: Interview participants.

	Long-time residents	Newer residents	School officials
1	Mr. Adams	Mrs. Hayes	Mrs. Baker
2	Mrs. Baker	Mrs. Hood	Mr. Bells
3	Mrs. Cooper	Mr. King	Mr. Cayley
4	Mr. Dawson	Mr. Newberry	Mrs. Elias
5	Mrs. Donard	Mrs. Stuart	Mrs. Matthews
6	Mrs. Edgecumbe	Mrs. Walsh	Mr. Maxwell
7	Mrs. Harrison		
8	Mr. Knob		
9	Mr. Lyell		
10	Mr. Owen		
11	Mrs. Ratz		
12	Mrs. Stanley		

The Interview Process

Interviews were conducted to assess the perceived value of the school to the

neighborhood and to determine why the school was rebuilt. Participants were contacted

by phone or email, given a short description of the project and asked to participate in an

interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location of the participant's

choosing; these included participant's' homes or offices, coffee shops, the University of

Montana's Mansfield Library and Paxson School. Participants were guaranteed

confidentiality and the interview commenced only after receiving written permission of

the participant. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of participants

with the exception of two: two participants preferred that their interviews not be

recorded, in which case detailed notes were taken and typed up following the interview so that key information would not be forgotten.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in question order and wording (Berg 2004). Semi-structured interviews also favor the used of probes, or questions used to clarify a response or elicit more information from the participant (Berg 2004). An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed for use during the interviews. This served more as a general outline for the interviews and because of the semi-structured approach was not strictly followed. During the interview, participants were asked about their neighborhood and their reasons for living there; about their neighbors and activities in which they participate; and whether they feel a sense of community, and what community means to them. Participants were also asked about Paxson School; to describe the rebuild and their involvement in the rebuild; and whether they believed the rebuild was a good decision today. Additionally, people were asked what the school brings to the neighborhood and if they see the school's contributions as an important aspect of their neighborhood. The interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word. Transcribed interviews, and notes from unrecorded interviews, were imported in QSR International's NVIVO software for data management and coding. NVIVO was used to organize and search the data from each in-depth interview. While NVIVO does not analyze data, it is helpful in identifying themes within the data. Transcriptions were first coded by question, and then coded by key word or topic. Thus, each interview was coded

at least twice. Codes, or simple nodes, were then organized into larger categories, or themes. The results of the coding analysis process were compiled and organized by theme. The themes, revolving around Paxson School, Paxson School Neighborhood, and Missoula Schools, as well as a comparison across the three groups of participants, are presented in the following sections.

RESULTS

*"I cried when the old Paxson was knocked down
but it was nice to get a new school."* Chelsea

This study attempted to answer three questions: what is the story of Paxson School and its rebuild; how did residents of the neighborhood perceive the value of the school leading up to the rebuild, and how do residents perceive the value of the school to the neighborhood today; and lastly, how did the situation with Paxson School compare to schools in other areas of Missoula that ultimately under went closure? The results of this study are divided into three broad areas (also subsections of this section of the thesis): the Paxson School Story, the Paxson School Neighborhood, and the greater Missoula Public School system.

The first area, the Paxson School Story, weaves together the historical building aspects of the school, with memories of people who had attended it as children, and then whose children attended the school. The section deals with the events leading up to the rebuilding of the school and how the parents and neighborhood residents were involved with the rebuild.

Several themes emerged in the second area, the Paxson School Neighborhood. These themes are presented to give a larger picture of the neighborhood and then focus on the neighborhood's relationship with Paxson School. From the beginning of nearly every interview, it was evident that there were collective norms and values shared by residents of the neighborhood. The character of the neighborhood was important. People experienced a sense of community and a sense of belonging to the neighborhood. Within the neighborhood, there are supporting networks and a feeling of reciprocity between

neighbors. Safety emerged as a theme in that people feel free to move through their neighborhood and the safety of the neighborhood contributes to the independence of the children in the neighborhood; although there was also a concern voiced by some residents that the safety of the neighborhood is deteriorating. Schools are seen by residents as centers of the community, and as a starting point for belonging in the community. The evidence of the school as a starting point for belonging can be seen in the difference between responses from long-time residents and newer residents. Paxson building use, with regard to resident voting behavior in particular, appeared as another theme.

The third area, Missoula Schools, both residents and school officials commented on the scale of the project being larger than Paxson School. Residents expressed their vision as being more than just Paxson School; it was district focused in that they wanted Paxson School to be a model. After Paxson School, they planned on helping other schools and neighborhoods. Another theme surfaced in discussion of the impact rebuilding Paxson had on other schools in the district. A few individuals expressed concerns about the sprawling growth of Missoula. The final theme present is the difference between Paxson School and other Missoula Schools: Paxson has city-wide support.

The Paxson School Story

The original Paxson School was built in 1922. The building, designed by Ole Bakke, was the same design as the buildings that replaced Whittier and Willard Schools. When Paxson was built, it was on the edge of the platted land of Missoula. The layout of the original building can be seen in Figure 5.
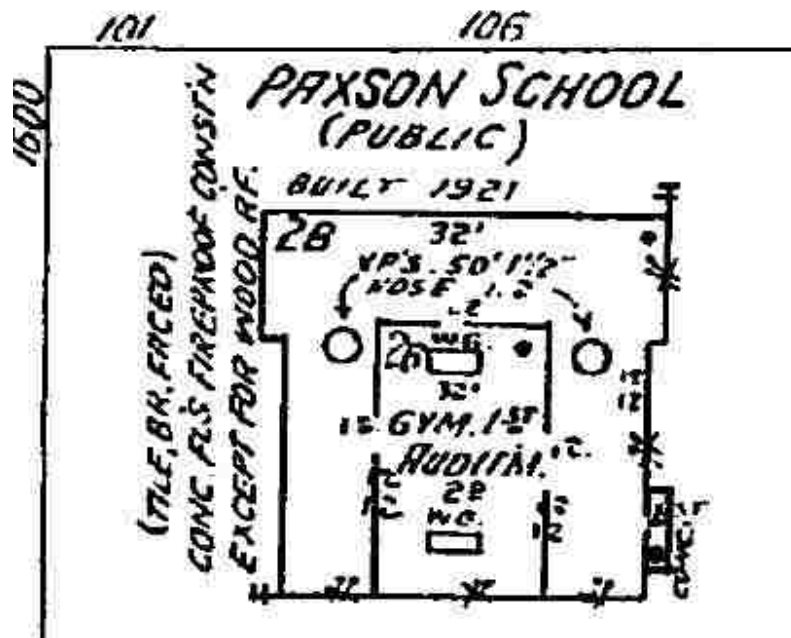
Figure 5: Original layout of Paxson School. Higgins Street is to the left hand side and Evans Street is on the top. From the Sanborn Fire Maps 1922.

Mr. Lyell remembers growing up in the area and attending Paxson School.

> Some of my most pronounced memories were there were about 35, 36, 37 kids in every class. It was...hysterical. We were the baby boom kids, so those classes were jammed but we didn't even know it. It was just a boat-load of fun. I had a lot of fun. I really loved it. Paxson was the old school. It was the traditional, old Missoula school. I remember when we played flash cards... where you'd stand by the guy's desk or the girl's desk and then the teacher would put up a flash card [that had] a mathematical equation on it and if you got it, you got to keep going around, and if you lost you took the seat. I can remember getting almost all the way around, I thought, "Man, I'm never gonna..." you know what I mean. Cause the competition was like if you could get around the classroom...it'd be great. I remember... we were so beat by then. There was like 80 rows. Someone was going to get you sooner or later. You're always...it's impossible to get around in flash cards. Yeah. It was crazy. It was active, I mean we were an active group. We spent time in the principal's office, you know...looking at walls and stuff. But it was always good fun. You know, we were just active. Lot of kids. That's my memory. Kids everywhere. No matter where you were. It was great.

> The building was three stories with a spilt level entrance where you had to either

go up stairs or down stairs upon entering. The gym was in the middle of the school, going

up two stories and open to the second floor with a balcony surrounding it. Mrs. Matthews

recalls,

> It had two floors and there was this big huge open gym in the middle. It wasn't a
> really great building because the noise from the gym...everybody had to keep their
> doors closed to their classrooms because everything reverberated. And then you'd
> have Christmas parties and my husband was standing on the floor one time and
> there were kids up above and somebody had the flu and threw-up on him. (haha)
> So those kinds of things. [It was] hard to fit a lot people in one space.

Mr. Lyell describes the library and the top floor of the school.

> Our library was in....the top floor....auditorium. It was built into the back of the
> auditorium. They just like, built a square and put books in it. And it was so fun.
> And I don't even think the walls up to the ceiling. I think they just went 3/4 of the
> way up so you could...it was like a huge cubical, you know...you walked in and
> that was the library. And then...you'd have assemblies in the auditorium and you'd
> walk out and you're in the library. You know. It was so weird. But you didn't think
> about it then. And there was a stage up there. On the top floor there was a stage in
> the auditorium and periodically you'd have, you know, school performances in
> there and be up on the stage. And, the seats were just like the kind you see in a
> movie. Those little wooden ones with ahh...a little desk in front of them with two
> kids to a seat. You just sit there...and watch a production or something. That's
> where you sang. I mean that's where [the] choir was. You picture it...there's choir
> up there, all this stuff going on. ...all these classrooms around it.

In 1987, the Missoula School District shifted to a middle school system. Paxson

School became Paxson Elementary school, with grades K-5 and the 6-8 graders went to

Washington Middle School. It was also about this time that the school board decided that

it needed to do something about what it referred to as the "Paxson Problem." The

problem laid not in the students, but rather in the building structure itself. With new

regulations requiring that kindergarten and first grade classrooms be on the ground level

and be accessible to handicapped persons, Paxson Elementary didn't comply. In 1989, the

population of Paxson Elementary was pretty large with 320 students and there was talk

about dividing the school and busing some kids or some grades to another facility. That

was met with great resistance from the Paxson parents. They did not want their kids to be

bused elsewhere. An exchange principal for Paxson sat in on a board meeting and got wind that the school board was talking about doing something with the school. He passed the information on to the PTA. One parent recalls,

> I met with the principal and he was very supportive of getting a group of parents together. He kind of empowered our group, and said, "Well, go for it. Fight it. See if you can't get a new school."

In May of 1990, the district interviewed architects to discuss remodeling the school and bringing everything up to code. In June, the district accepted a bid from an architectural firm that presented an initial phase study involving a charrette process to obtain input from the community. The charrette was held the last 2 days of July, 1990. Everyone was invited to attend the charrette at the school. Members from the board of trustees, the PTA, teachers and staff at Paxson, elementary students, the University Homeowners Association, University Housing, and City Hall were all invited to participate. The charrette reviewed three different options regarding Paxson School:

1. Leave the school as is architecturally. Attendance boundaries could be redrawn and students could be bused to another facility.

2. Construction. This could be as various remodels and additions, or demolish existing building and construct a new building.

3. Close Paxson School. Purchase another property within the attendance area to build a school.

Options one and three were quickly disregarded and much discussion revolved around the second option. One school board member said the following,

> I had never even heard of the word charrette. The first person I had heard use it was [the] superintendent of schools. And he proposed that we have a charrette. I think it lasted 3 days. And people just talked and talked and talked and talked until they got something that most people seemed to support. And it was this: leave it in front, knock it down, build a new one. Have some connection to the past, people will take the bricks and so on.

It became evident that the cost of remodeling the existing building to provide for the needs of the school would be more expensive than demolishing the building and constructing a new building. In September, both the school board and the Paxson PTA voted to support the new building. Mrs. Ratz remembers,

> And when we did finally come to that decision that the school's going to have to come down because it would be more expensive...we did a whole process of a lot of parent meetings and meetings with the school district and the bottom line was it would be nice to preserve it, but it would cost more to actually preserve and upgrade the building to standard, then it would be to construct a new building on the site. And the school board was not terribly interested in constructing a new school. They were more pressing for closing it down and so we organized a group of parents and went to the school board and said, "Let us try to pass a bond issue to build a new school. What have you got to lose? If it gets voted down, then you close it down, you tear it down, what ever you do with it. If it passes, you have the money to build a new school." And that was kind of what it came down to.

Not everyone was supportive of building a new school. A few people were against tearing down the structure because it was an old building. Others felt that there were other buildings in the school district that were in worse shape than Paxson. The charrette really helped people voice their concerns and build support for the new building. When asked how the group of parents got together Mrs. Stanley recalls,

> I remember talking with parents at Bonner Park, just over playing with kids. It was the whole scuttle-butt in the neighborhood. A lot of it came out of talking with neighbors, but there were also some people who started saying, "We need to get organized. We need to look at what they are looking at and have some voice in what's happening as opposed to being told that this is what's going to happen." And so we sat down and started looking and working with the architect and saying "what is it you envision, and why do you want to do this?" and looking at the actual cost of building this new building. And it was very informal at first, and anybody who wanted to could be there, but then we started talking to the architect, and what it would cost to make the current building accessible. What it would cost to do the things we needed to do to make it safe. It immediately became clear that it would have been more expensive to make the building accessible, given the little kids in the building, given all of those things. Much more expensive to make it accessible, than it was to tear it down and start from scratch. Well, then it seems stupid, if you can tear it down and start from scratch and build a really nice building that's accessible, that meets all your needs, that

does all of those kinds of things. And is less expensive than revamping a building built in the 1930s, why wouldn't you do that?

Parents went around the neighborhood with a survey as Mrs. Edgecumbe

remembers. She was passionate about keeping the school in the neighborhood.

We sat there brainstorming and said they can't do this. They cannot do this to our kids, they can't do this to us. And what we did was we talked to the school board and told them that we were going to do a survey of the University Area. And we drew up a survey, you know, a question thing. I know that my husband and I spent three solid weeks when he came home from work and after dinner...going up and down. He'd take one side of a whole street and I would take the other side of the whole street. Asking people how they felt about losing the school in this area. And one of the things was: "Did you buy your house for this? Would you see your property value going down if there was no school?" And that was just a total consensus. Yes, they bought their house specifically to be in this area. And yeah, they could see the value of their house going down if their kids were bused off to Lewis and Clark. So we presented this to the school board, and this was pretty hard to argue, that this entire area wanted a school. So they said, "Fine, if you can..." They ran an election. And we had to...we had to pass this ourselves. The school board wasn't going to sponsor us in anyway. And we spent...close...well, many, many nights in different garages with huge pieces of plywood. And put the sign, "Apples for kids, vote for Paxson School." Something to that effect...but then we had to post these huge billboard-type things. We had to do all of this ourselves.

Mrs. Ratz remembers raising money to put up yard signs to support the bond

issue. They needed to have a nonpartisan group to handle the money.

So there was this ballot committee formed called KIDS, and it was Keep Improving District Schools. And it had been organized through the state, through the commissioner for political practice several years earlier, and it was used to raise money to help promote passing school levies and stuff. Different people would donate to it from time to time, and this group would put up yard signs during levy elections and say, "please vote for school levies" and stuff. So we used that. So we didn't have to set up a new organization. We asked if we could use that one, and it fit well within the definition of what it did. So then we started raising money, and we mostly did it through the Paxson community. Started really promoting, going to Paxson PTA meetings, having community meetings at the school. It was all part of this process of designing it, too. We kept bringing more and more people in, so we gained support that way. And then just asked for personal donations. I can not even remember how much we raised, but it wasn't a lot of money. I don't think we raised more than about five thousand dollars. That was the money we used to make buttons and do yard signs. And I think we did

some letters, some flyers. It was a real grassroots campaign. We didn't hire anybody to do a campaign. We did it all ourselves. We did some door to door. We targeted, we went down, we looked at who voted, in what districts. And we targeted those districts for any mailings that we did, or any contacts that we did. Or we made sure that we went to their meetings, and said, "this is why we're hoping you'll support this bond issue."

The bond issue was on the November 1990 ballot. It passed giving the district money to build a new Paxson School and make additions to several other schools in Missoula. Once the district had the money, Paxson parents were specific about how they wanted their school to be built. "We [wanted] a new school that fit the tone of the neighborhood," recalls Mrs. Edgecumbe. Parents, teachers, community members, and even the kids had a say in how the school was designed through the charrette process the previous summer. Through the charrette, many parents and teachers felt that they really helped design the new building. Mrs. Ratz remembers,

> We wanted to save certain elements. There was a bell that was part of the school, and there was ivy that was growing up one part, on the west side. So certain members of the school took up the ivy, and we replanted it. And the bell - this came up during when we were working with the architects - we said we'd like to keep that element of the old school. And so on the east side of the school, the entrance there, he built a special area for the bell, as you're going into the school. So we kept some old elements, and we did a little time capsule that the kids worked on that we buried under the building. About Paxson and it's history and what it meant to them to go there and stuff like that.

Teachers were asked what the best layout for the classrooms (the floor plans of the new building can be found in Appendix C). One teacher noted,

> And a well-designed kindergarten room is not the same as a well-designed fifth grade room. And a well-designed fifth grade room is not the same as a well-designed second grade room. And so the grade level rooms ... were designed specifically in mind for ...it's a kindergarten room, we need to have centers...and it was really well-designed how that was going to be. Instead of taking all the room with the giant carts for TVs, the TVs were mounted [on the wall]. So I really appreciated the fact that they had all of those kinds of things happen.

Many community members wanted the new Paxson School to have some resemblance to the old school. The building was built on the same corner of the lot as the older building. The concrete name plate from the original Paxson School was saved and duplicated so that the new building bears two name plates. And the old-fashioned school bell from the original school was saved and put in the east side cupola over the east side entrance. Parents got involved with the school grounds as well. One parent recalls,

> They had lilacs at Paxson. And one of the moms got together a campaign: would people donate lilac bushes to the new school because they just tore everything out except the big tree. And umm...we bought two lilac bushes for our [kids].

And there was concern about the school's place in the neighborhood as well. Mrs. Stanley said, "We wanted the building to look like it had always been there, like it was part of the neighborhood. Not, something that didn't belong in the neighborhood." And she continues,

> We talked with the architect about making sure we didn't go for the little dinky window and things. We wanted it to look like the old school building with the great big tall windows. With the airiness. With that kind of facade, so that it would look right. We talked a lot about, there were huge concerns then, just as there are now, about what was going to happen with the intersection at Mount. Because it was such a dangerous corner. And that was before they started bringing over the kids from Roosevelt, bringing over the kids from Willard. It was a dangerous street to cross. There were still kids who were crossing the street there. How are we going to do this so that it's a safe place for kids to cross. So our concern went way beyond just the building itself. But if we were going to do this, let's do it right.

The building was constructed during the 1991-1992 school year. For that year, the children stayed together and were all bused to Jefferson School (that had been closed a few years earlier). The new building seems to fit well into the neighborhood. The parents, teachers and kids were happy with the building for the most part. Mr. Knob said, "the

difference between the new building and the old one was pretty dramatic. Just a vast

improvement. It's a good thing they did that." Mrs. Matthews says,

> I think it turned out well. There were a couple things that I learned about. Well, one was putting the school right on Higgins and having the playground in the back. I thought that was interesting to be because I thought you would do it the opposite way, until we heard from the architects why you wouldn't.

Mr. Adams describes the building as follows,

> Basically the school's really simple. It's double load hallways that go through the school from North to South. And the gym is kind of here. But anyway, this is the music room, right here. And I consider this to be the front door, and this to be the service side or the back door, and there is some community entrances here for use of the gym after school so folks don't have to go in like this. But this is really, from the kid's point of view, this is really the front door to the school from the kids' viewpoint because the kids line up, they gather on the playground before school, and the kids line up, and this is kind of a covered area so that if it's raining or snowing or whatever, the kids kind of come in under a cover. So this cover is actually the band room, music room on the second floor. And because it's isolated and sticking out like this, it's kind of isolated by this hallway from the rest of the classrooms, so there is a bit of a sound block. That way they can bang on drums and play the band instruments and not really bug the rest of the school. And it's a cover for the front door for the kids... And then the gym. I think there's a curved wall right here, the hallway comes down and curves right here, that's so you don't really see the full length of the hallway. It doesn't look so long. Anyway, there's double doors here and here that kind of provide a sound seal for the gym to the rest of the school, too. And that block of space is administration which is right out front. [The front entrance has a] two story high space with the skylight overhead and the bridge.

Mrs. Stanley commented,

> ...in a lot of ways, the building didn't change a whole lot. The kids still went out and did their Halloween parade around the block for everyone in the neighborhood to come out and see. And the kids still did their field day and all the old neighbors in the neighborhood, people who lived around the school, people would still come out to watch the kids do their field day exercises. So there was still that kind of feeling, whether it was the old building or the new building.

When asked why the rebuild was successful, the majority of the responses had to

do with the parents. Mrs. Harrison said it was the caliber of the parents.

Boy, it sounds so arrogant, but realistically, they were parents that were highly involved in the community, so ...I think they welded some power. You know people in some of the biggest law firms. People in high profile, University professors..and leaders in the married student housing community.

A teacher at Paxson school said, "The parents rallied and got together as a group

and went to the board and went to the superintendent and said, you are not closing our

school. And...the parents have a lot of power."

A few people credited the community with saving Paxson School. Mrs. Elias said

Paxson has always had a strong, supportive community.

They are very interested. Paxson was always kind of like a little mini- United Nations, which we always thought was kind of neat....cause of the diversity we would get from the University. And so it wasn't necessarily people with money, but a lot of different backgrounds and education. And very supportive of the school. And one of the things that points to that is there were hardly any parent-teacher conferences where any parents were absent.

Mr. Lyell says it all comes down to one thing.

Culture. I mean it's just that simple. It is the soul of the University district to start. Because education doesn't start when you get to the tertiary level. I mean, if you believe in it and you understand it... you don't put numbers on it. I don't know how other people approach it, but I know there is a lot of people that say, how can you spend so much for education for your kids? You know, why [would] you put a new school in that costs so much? Okay, well...you just don't get it. You know, with all due respect...it doesn't have anything to do with numbers. If you're worried about, you know, going to a school, or having a school built that costs money because you're running a CPA algorithmical calculation on it and it doesn't pan out cause you don't get a hundred thousand dollar job when you're 19 years old. I mean, okay, you just don't get it. It's cultural, it's soul. It's...it's life. And it doesn't mean you go on and become a professor. What it means is that you then have that side to you and so you understand the world, you understand how people deal with each other, you can handle other cultures. I mean...I mean, to be honest with you, that's Hellgate. Hellgate High School is cultural. It's very different, you know, from other high schools. I mean, there's nothing pasteurized about Hellgate High School. I told my kids, if you survive 4 years at Hellgate, the rest of your life is going to seem like a piece of cake, man. Because, [Hellgate is] integrated. And I don't mean gender or race. I mean culture. That school for Montana is a cultural integration of ... ideas and it's powerful. And that is the continuation of Paxson.

He continues in response to the question, Why was Paxson saved whereas other schools have closed?

> And so I think that culture in that U district was, and I think is still there. It was important to continue those cultures cause that was the kind of people that were attracted to it, and it doesn't even have to deal with party preference, you're a liberal or a conservative mainly. That's what it is. And it was well defined, you know, when I was a kid. I mean, it...it was well known in the city. And I think there are other schools that are that way now. But that's why other schools closed. And they just don't have that uprising...because..because they don't have that culture. And I'm not saying that's bad. My comment isn't you know, right or wrong thing. It's just that's what it is, and if you believe in it and you're attracted to it and that's what you get there, and that's what's important to you...you don't care what it costs.

The Paxson School Neighborhood

The University District is special to the people that live there. Mrs. Edgecumbe says that "people live here because they choose to" and that people in the area are "like-minded" people sharing the same values. When asked why they initially moved into the neighborhood, respondents gave a variety of answers. For some they just liked the house and didn't know much about the neighborhood. Once they had the house, they began to see the benefits of the neighborhood and the close-knit community that exists. Others were initially attracted to the layout of the neighborhood. Mrs. Walsh says,

> When I was a kid, we lived out in Seattle. And we always lived in, I don't want to say subdivisions or anything, but we always lived in newly developed areas, post-post WW2, so 1960 and newer. Areas [where] cul-de-sacs were a big deal [and] streets didn't go straight through. I absolutely love living in an area with streets and a sidewalk, that's all a grid pattern, where I can walk to everything. I can ride my bike, and walk the kids to school. I love living close to the University. When our kids were learning to ride bikes, we just took them over to the University on the oval and ...cause you don't have to worry about traffic - you just worry about pedestrians. Watch out for the people! I just love living in an area where the streets go all the way through and where there are sidewalks to walk on and people walk everywhere.

> Mr. Adams said the layout of the neighborhood fosters a sense of connectedness.

I just love the University neighborhood. Because it's such a humane...the streets, the way the houses are laid out, the scale of the neighborhood is just so much more pleasant than anywhere else, in my opinion, than anywhere else in Missoula. [The] neighborhood is sort of compact enough to where there's a sense of community. There are places where you can walk to services where you don't have to wade through a sea of automobiles in order to live your life. The architectural character of the homes, it's varied, but then there's a certain consistency ... porches are important. [There's] a character that's...you can probably feel it, but it's hard to describe what makes it feel right. It's just a quality of life that I think is a lot better.

Mrs. Stuart also talked about the porches being important.

...for instance, the way houses are oriented, people spend a lot of time on their front porches, and so they're talking to one another; there aren't garages out on the street. So I think architecturally, there is a sense of community.

"Community," according to Mr. Dawson, "is not just structures, it's people and attitude." Mrs. Stuart agrees that community is people.

...I trust and interact with my neighbors, and I feel like they have my best interest in mind. I think that people are outside in their front yards, versus backyards. I think that there's a general ... sense of ... shared values of what we'd like to see happen. We have an involved neighborhood; people that do a lot of things. I think because we are proximate to the University, there's a lot of people that are involved in different events over here so it seems like it has some depth to it. I think, for me, the biggest sense of community is probably just trust and kind of feeling like my kids can be out playing and I don't necessarily need to be around for things to be maintained. Like if someone gets hurt, someone's going to pick up the ball and make sure that...if there is bullying going on, people are going to intervene. People are paying attention.

Everyone agreed that there was a sense of community in the neighborhood, however, the newer residents felt the sense of community more strongly than the long-time residents. In many responses, long-time residents said 'we used to' or 'when the kids were younger.' There used to be block parties and Christmas parties between neighbors. Mr. Dawson said,

There were a lot of kids that were relatively the same ages. And there was probably a lot more interaction at that time. And there may be now with people, but not with us now that our kids are gone. And we have other interests.

Few of the long-time residents seemed to be engaged in many neighborhood activities at all. Mr. Maxwell says of neighborhood activities, "quite frankly, I disagree with some of them. The University Homeowners Association has kind of legislated the hell of out that neighborhood. I can't even park in front of my house anymore." A newer resident, Mrs. Stuart said she does a lot of activities with her neighbors including barbecues and taking vacations together. Mrs. Hood, also a newer resident, says,

> People are out, like just out in their yards, doing stuff, and walking their dogs, so we all know each other really well. I know who lives in what house, and they know me. And it seems like we do a lot of things together, too. Like in the summer we'll have giant trips to Big Dipper. People with kids and people without kids, whoever, just a bunch of people in the neighborhood will walk down there. It just seems like a good, friendly place, where people know the neighbors.

Knowing and interacting with neighbors helps contribute to the sense of community felt by residents. This is evident in the following response to the meaning of community. Mrs. Hood says,

> It means everything to me. That's why we moved from Florence, because I did not feel like we were a part of a community there. I felt really isolated, and Florence didn't even really seem like a town. And we did the whole, we built our house and we had five acres and we were thinking that's what we really wanted in our lives...and we hated it. So we moved to this little teeny, tiny yard in the middle of the University District, but....gosh, it's really important to me to be around people who, for the most part, have similar values to me. And have similar goals and lifestyles and I feel like the people in our neighborhood do.

Mr. King thinks community means talking to people and getting to know them. Knowing your neighbors leads to a sense of community. He says,

> It means...conversation...sort of stopping and talking and communicating with people that you live in the same neighborhood with. Familiarizing yourself with who they are, what they do. And I think that that then leads to sort of a sense of connection between people. It leads to an increased sense of trust between neighbors. A sense of watching out for one another. Looking out for one another's children. I think [that] eventually just the informal communication that occurs just as people are out in their yards and seeing one another leads to more organized

activities involving the people who live on the block. And that's to me, what community means. It's knowing people, communicating with them, having a shared sense of interest, and doing things with them, spending time with them.

Getting out in the neighborhood is a great way to meet with neighbors. Everyone likes that the neighborhood is walkable. Mrs. Matthews likes that she can walk to things close by. She can walk downtown, to the University, to the schools, to Bonner Park. She says, "All that contributes to a neighborhood... When you walk, you see your neighbors, you see the neighborhood, you're more engaged with the neighborhood." In fact, the ability and the importance of being able to walk places came up in every interview with neighborhood residents, both Long-time and Newer residents. People love the central location of the neighborhood. Mr. King is one of the newer residents in the neighborhood. He says,

> [We] felt somewhat isolated up in the Rattlesnake and [my wife] regretted always having to get in the car to go somewhere. So the main reason for moving down into the University area was for her to be able to walk with our children to downtown, to the hip strip ... Bonner Park. I worked here at the University, so it would enable me to walk or bike to school. So primarily [our reason for moving here was] its central location to so many different areas of the city that we'd want to visit and it gave us the opportunity to walk instead of drive places.

The long-time residents enjoy the walkable neighborhood as well. Mr. Maxwell says,

> We'll be in our living room and see the kids walking down [the street], and we know they're going to Paxson. It kind of harkens back to the old days when we sent our kids out.

Mr. Owen, too, loves watching the kids walk to and from school. During our interview we had to stop and watch the kids through the window as they walked home. He views walking as an important aspect of the neighborhood and of childhood. Mrs.

Edgecumbe says that for kids to be able to walk places in their neighborhood gives them

independence, which is really important to her.

Mrs. Hood attributes some of the sense of community she has in the neighborhood

to the school. She says,

I just really, really like walking to school, and picking up my daughter after
school. My mom, friends and I just stand around and talk a lot. So it's a nice kind
of social thing for us as well as the kids. I know people who have, that still go to
the international school, they drive and drop their kids off, and drive and pick
their kids up. So it's a much different thing than people all just walking or riding
their bikes or whatever to school.

For many respondents, their sense of community began with the school. Many

mentioned the school as a real factor in their decision to move into the area. A few went

as far to say that if the school had not been there, they would not have moved into the

area. According to residents, the school is real important to the neighborhood and the

sense of community felt by residents. Mrs. Donard, a long-time resident, said that the

Paxson parents felt the school was the focus of the community in that area and for that

reason pushed so hard to keep the school as a neighborhood elementary school. Mrs. Ratz

says, "Schools are the heart of the neighborhood. At one point or another, most people's

kids go there and it's a place where people feel comfortable gathering."

Mrs. Stanley says neighborhood schools have a sense of community. They are more than

a building.

People in the University District know the benefit of a neighborhood school. Mr.

Newberry, a newer resident to the area says,

I'm a strong advocate for neighborhood schools. I see what's happened...they've
made kind of a mega Rattlesnake Elementary School. [I]t makes economic sense,
sometimes, to close down ...multiple small neighborhood schools, and consolidate
everyone, but I think, really from my own experience, having a neighborhood
school where people do walk and you get this kind of ...you know, parents meet

each other face to face. I'm afraid what would happen if they closed down, not that I think that it's in the works, but if they closed down our neighborhood school and I had to take our kids to another school, or maybe they would have to start their day 45 minutes earlier to be bused to another school...that you would go up and you'd put your kid on the bus...and not really interact with other parents as much. Or if you drove and dumped 'em off...you know, in the sort of idling zone and made sure that they got on the schoolyard, that you wouldn't get to know the rest of the people in the community as much. I think neighborhood schools, even if they appear to be less cost effective, they have other benefits that are not as easy to quantify. Like, mingling with other parents; getting to know other members of the community, and just serving as a place where people can hash out ideas. One great thing about the neighborhood is there's a lot of houses in a small area and there's a lot of kind of front porches where people spend time in their front yards and get to know their neighbors. I think a neighborhood school has a similar effect and it really makes people sort of take notice and take pride in their neighborhoods.

A benefit of having a neighborhood school is that kids that go to school together can play together outside of school. This came up in three interviews with long-time residents and one interview with a newer resident. Mrs. Edgecumbe talked about how she didn't go to a neighborhood school as a child.

> I know I went to the Catholic School in my hometown, and I only had one friend, two friends on that side of town. But we had a public school three blocks away and I had a lot of friends, but we didn't use the same textbooks. They learned different spelling words...Things were so completely different and I remember thinking, 'I feel left out.'

She wanted her kids to feel as though they belonged, not just in their family, and in their school, but in their neighborhood. She says, "when your kids live in a different area then where they go to school, they're left out of a lot of activities that go on there." Mrs. Stanley remembers that keeping the kids in the neighborhood was an important consideration when discussing rebuilding Paxson School.

> We wanted to make sure that [it was] still serving a neighborhood where the kids can still play together. And it wasn't an exclusive thing. I'd watched what happened with the Rattlesnake [area]. When you had kids that didn't play together after school because they had to get on buses and go home, you lose that continuity.

In addition to a school's value for neighborhood continuity there are many things a school brings to the neighborhood. The following responses are from the long-time residents when asked what a school brings to a neighborhood.

It brings quite a bit of vitality. (Mr. Knob)

It tries to bring the community together. (Mrs. Baker)

It brings a high level of public education to the neighborhood. It operates as a center. It's a congregating place. (Mr. Lyell)

A focal point. (Mrs. Donard)

A gathering spot. (Mrs. Harrison)

A neighborhood center. (Mrs. Ratz)

A place for the community to gather. (Mrs. Stanley)

A civic gathering place for both indoor and outdoor activities. (Mr. Adams)

Families. (Mrs. Edgecumbe)

It brings younger people and kids. (Mr. Dawson)

A place of identity for the children. A social center. A vault of memories. (Mr. Owen)

Responses from the newer residents, tended to focus on the sense of community schools bring to a neighborhood. For Mrs. Stuart, the idea of 'neighborhood' was all about the kids. She feels the schools bring kids to the neighborhood. She says,

I think [a school] brings kids to the community, and I think that that's an important thing to keeping people's perspectives in order. It's fun to have kids running around. And having...the noise. I just think that that's a good addition to any neighborhood. It's what makes it a neighborhood.

Mr. Dawson said that schools bring younger people to the neighborhood, which he views as a good thing. Many of the participants mentioned the mixed age of residents in the neighborhood as a benefit and as something they liked about the neighborhood.

Mr. King, a newer resident, felt that having a neighborhood school contributed to neighborhood identity. He felt it was important to have kids around the neighborhood that were able to play with each other, in the same area as the school and have a feeling of neighborhood. He says,

> I think having that neighborhood school there contributes to a sense of connection between families and between children and it also contributed to feeling as though it's a coherent neighborhood. If kids were having to go to a school that was outside the immediate neighborhood, that sense of immediate neighborliness, it wouldn't be as strong. And I think that the fact that all the families and all the children in that immediate neighborhood are going to a local neighborhood school, I think it contributes to a stronger sense of neighborhood identity among the people that are living there. And if Paxson wasn't there, I think you would lose that. So when I'm over at Bonner Park, [and my kids are younger than school age], but we always end up interacting with kids who are going to Paxson, whether in first grade, second grade, third grade, and so many times there'll be another kid sort of riding their bike along the edge of the park and the kid who is on the play apparatus is like, "Hi, Roger, how are you?" So they really know one another. And I think in large part that has to do with them knowing one another from Paxson School. And if they were going to some other school, I think they wouldn't have that strong of a connection with one another as they do have. So I think that it has really contributed to a more vital community life in the area.

The school officials also mentioned the schools as being *the* identity of the neighborhood. Mr. Bells said,

> I understand what people talk about when they lose their school, what a loss that is. It's like you get up in the Northeast part of Montana and they're closing churches, and it's like a death.

Many residents said they supported the rebuilding of Paxson because they didn't want to lose their school. The school brought a great deal to the neighborhood, as a physical space and as a social bonding space. The school helped develop the sense of

community of the neighborhood and the neighborhood residents began to see the school

as an integral part of the neighborhood and their identity. Mr. Donard said, "We would

have had a strong sense of loss had it closed."

When asked whether rebuilding Paxson was good for the neighborhood, the

response was almost entirely favorable from residents. "Oh, definitely. No question. No

doubt." was Mr. Lyell's response. Mrs. Baker, a school official, felt that it was the right

decision at the time, however, she says a lot has changed at the school since the rebuild.

Now, she wonders whether it was the right decision. Other long-time residents enjoy

seeing the kids walk to school in the morning and one even mentioned the school as a

community site. Mrs. Cooper says,

> I think it will always be a school that the community uses. And especially the
> University area. Seeing the number of strollers that go down my street...and
> seeing the number of people that go by, I'm so amazed at the influx again. I think
> it would be sad to have to bus those kids...wherever...to another old school? Or, a
> new school on the hill or something? No, this is the right thing.

Mr. Dawson thought the decision to rebuild was the right one for the

neighborhood. He said the neighborhood residents really supported the rebuilding of the

school.

> The nature of the people who were here, and the attachment they had to Paxson,
> and also people who lived outside the district, but had gone to school at Paxson.
> They really wanted to see a neighborhood school, and again, I don't think busing
> per-se, was that big of a problem, but they liked the idea of a neighborhood
> school. And whether they had come back into the area for a reason, because they
> had gone there...but still thought well, Paxson is still a neighborhood school. They
> liked that, and they saw it as a real value...And I think that probably dictated the
> outcome to a degree.

One school official mentioned that rebuilding Paxson on the same site was not a

good decision for the neighborhood. He felt that to have built on the Roosevelt school site

would have been a better option as the lot was larger. In fact today, a large number of kids

attending Paxson are bused from the Roosevelt area. In 1998 Roosevelt was closed. The building was sold and is now the home of St. Joseph's Catholic School. Another school official, Mr. Maxwell, feels that a "residential area is stronger if it has a school to identify with." Keeping Paxson School in the neighborhood helped the neighborhood stay together. Mrs. Matthews thought the neighborhood would have changed had Paxson no longer been there.

> I would imagine it would have [changed]. I think it is attractive for parents to try to move into this neighborhood for their children. So it may have changed. I don't know. You know, the neighborhood's still pretty attractive with Hellgate and the University being nearby and downtown nearby. But I think it would have changed.

Many of the residents, both long-time and newer, would have not moved into the area had Paxson School not been there. Paxson School was a draw for numerous residents, and two residents moved to the area specifically for Paxson School. A few of the residents grew up in the area and moved back when they had kids. Mrs. Hayes says, "We had always wanted to come back. We had deep roots in this community." The school establishes a connection between the kids and the neighborhood that lasts through time. People want to live in areas that give them a sense of connectedness and provide a tie to their past. A neighborhood school provides value to the neighborhood and as one resident says,

> I think that having an elementary school in the area, really does bring families and provides, definitely more of a sense of community, and [a] intergenerational aspect [to the neighborhood].

Two unexpected themes surfaced during the interviews with neighborhood residents: safety and building use. A few feel the neighborhood has become less safe in recent years. This was particularly true in regard to the newer residents. Mrs. Stuart says,

I would say that I do feel like the neighborhood is getting less safe. That even in the 10 years that I've lived here, I feel like the sphere of influence, maybe from the University, or...maybe it's drug related, or whatever, I don't think it's as safe as it was. I see a lot more garbage on the streets that I pick up, I see a lot more graffiti.

The second interesting thing came about in a discussion of the use of the school building. Many residents responded that Paxson was their voting place, but a few then mentioned they increasingly vote absentee. Mrs. Hayes says,

I love voting. And I love the social-ness of going to a poll. I love interacting with the judges, and the people I see, because voting to me is Christmas. It's a major day. Ballots are getting so long, that I'm getting sort of won over by absentee [voting], because inevitably...there's always just one thing, some bond issue or something, and I get there and I go, "I don't know what the heck this is." And I don't like that feeling. So absentee, you get the ballot, then you can double check, you can study up, whereas, it's show-time if you're in the booth. Make a decision. I think I'm probably going to do more absentee.

Another respondent likes the convenience of absentee voting. He says, "I get the permanent absentee because with work its just more convenient to get that."

Mr. Dawson says he might switch to absentee voting. Of the last election he says,

I forgot about it, so I ended up going over to vote this time, but my wife, won't [vote absentee]. She says, "I like to go over there on voting day. I like to participate, so I'm willing to go over and I'm going to vote."

Missoula Public Schools

The third part of this study compared the situation at Paxson School to other schools in Missoula that were eventually closed. Interestingly, the parents that worked so hard to get Paxson rebuilt were not just focused on Paxson School. They wanted to design a system so that any neighborhood could work to fight a school closure and save their school. Mrs. Stanley says,

One of the big issues, ... was that we didn't want it just to be about Paxson, and that's why we came up with the "Keep Improving District Schools" Because then it was KIDS, and it was all about kids, that was the focus. And it was about

improving district schools, not just that school... but [it] all fell apart because we all got busy with raising our children and doing our things, and Paxson was built. And our great ideals of making sure that it wasn't just this school, kind of dissolved into the everyday, we need to get stuff done. And the intent [was to make sure] schools stayed in the limelight. And we dropped the ball. We got ours and we quit.

The rebuild of Paxson, may have inadvertently affected other schools in the district as well. Roosevelt School is fairly close to Paxson School. It closed in 1998. The main reason a school is closed is a lack of population to support the school. A few people made a connection between a school closure and a change in the neighborhood. Mrs. Ratz said once a school closes, the sense of community in the neighborhood slowly disappears. Another respondent choose to look at the closure of Willard and the affect on the neighborhood. She was familiar with the pattern of closures in Missoula and didn't like the fact that new schools were being built on the periphery. She says,

But as soon as we start building schools up on the ring-side, what's going to happen is, what happened in this neighborhood. It's going to be that families move to where the neighborhood schools are, because [they] think neighborhood schools are really important. And as I recall, there was never a chance that Paxson was not going to be open. It would have just been a smaller scope. It was going to have influence on the rest of, you know, if it had stayed the way it was... I think it's bad for Missoula every time we close a functional building in the district, so that we can build more schools on the outside. I think we need to encourage people to live closer. I think it's good to have schools that are walking distance. Not bus kids from Upper Linda Vista down to go to school in town. If they're going to get bused, that's great, they have to get bused, but the parents need to know that going in. "We aren't building a neighborhood school up here. You're making a choice." And encourage people to live in town. Because if you look at the houses around [Willard] compared to the houses in the neighborhood around Paxson... As I said, this area [Willard] has become not a neighborhood anymore. There are still some neighbors around here who are really great neighbors, but a lot of them are very transient. It's rentals, it's...people are in and out of here, and they don't care. And that's changed. The kinds of things that you see in the neighborhood change when you don't have a neighborhood school.

And she continues talking about neighborhood schools,

[Our support of Paxson] wasn't just [for] the school itself, the building itself, it was that gathering spot, it was the whole sense that we are the neighborhood and the neighborhood is us. And I think that you lose that when you shut down the schools in town and start building them up on hillsides so that people can have their houses up there. If we needed that school up there, it would be different, but you don't shut down existing schools that are in functioning buildings -and Roosevelt is a very functioning building, and Dickinson is a very functioning building, and [Willard], as long as it were older kids, is a very functioning building. I don't understand why you shut down functioning buildings and build new buildings someplace else, because what you do is you change the pattern of where people live and how they view the school and the community.

Was rebuilding Paxson the right thing for Missoula Schools? This was a harder question for many respondents to answer, since they had wanted Paxson School to be a neighborhood school for their kids. A few looked at the pattern of school closures and said they were no longer sure rebuilding Paxson was the right decision for Missoula. Others simply said it was a good decision and now they have a really nice school. One school official commented, "I think any time you can keep a neighborhood school, it's a good thing."

There is no question that anytime a school is closed or consolidated with another school, the neighborhoods are affected. The switch to a middle school system in Missoula was mentioned by one respondent as a poor decision. He believes that a community doesn't have the same investment in a middle school (or a high school) as they do the elementary school. Thus, keeping small neighborhood schools with grade K-8, may be a better option to keep people invested in the schools. When Missoula made the switch in 1987, the new middle school neighborhoods felt the change. Their young kids had to be bused away and as Mrs. Stanley says,

...it doesn't create the same sense of community that it does when your kids go to that school. When they can walk to that school, when you don't have to bus them... I think that it degrades the neighborhood around it when there isn't - there's not the buy-in. It's not, "this is my community" when you have to go get in

the car to go to the grocery store, when you have to get in a car to go to school, when you have to get in a car to go wherever you are going, that erodes that sense of community.

So it all comes back to the question of why the rebuild of Paxson was successful. And this is the simple answer. Mr. Maxwell, a school official, says the one thing he remembers most about the Paxson meetings is that it wasn't just parents. He says,

> They had a very large...community, and ...it's one of the older schools, Paxson. And it for some weird reason, it had a ...I don't want to say a mystic, but it had an affection for it, that some of the other schools didn't have.

In comparison to Emma Dickinson, for instance, the only people at the meetings where closure was discussed were parents. There wasn't a great out-pouring of community support around other schools like there was for Paxson. Mr. Cayley, another school official, said the Paxson parents were "intelligent" and "politically savvy." The district, he recalls, didn't do much. "It was the parents."

Mr. Bells, another school official says the rebuild was a good decision.

> I don't even have a shred of doubt in that regard. I'm just so pleased. I think we needed to have it rebuilt. I'm just so pleased to see the building that occupies that space now as I reflect on what the building looked like before. Sure it's new, but it still preserves that character in the neighborhood, it has that kind of presence and they have tried to save all those things. Save some of the [elements], save the bell, some things. That credit goes to [the architect] and the builders. They did a magnificent job with that. I still remember kind of the dedication in the gymnasium that we had. [The architect] was there, board members, a number of others, they offered a few comments. That was a joyous event.

The following section will provide discussion of the themes as they relate to the literature on place, place identity and community mobilization. More specifically, it will relate the role of a school in a neighborhood as a fundamental aspect of this neighborhood's identity.

DISCUSSION

*"My most memorable moment was just after my 3rd grade year,
when the old school was being torn down. It was kind of sad to see it go but when I saw
the new school I wasn't so depressed."* Brian

Through interviews with neighborhood residents this research uncovered much about the neighborhood and Paxson School. This section provides further discussion of the neighborhood and the perceived value of Paxson School to the neighborhood as it relates to the literature. Also addressed are the differences between this school and other Missoula schools that have ultimately closed.

Neighborhood

The term neighborhood is special to the people that live in the Paxson School Neighborhood. The residents "purposefully" live there, as one individual phrased it. The neighborhood is an elegant urban residential area of Missoula and its residents enjoy the easy access to services such as grocers, churches and schools. It is important that residents access services without getting into their cars and driving, similar to new urbanist ideals. Walking in the neighborhood creates a strong sense of community that, again, is valued by residents. To quote one resident, "people here [in the Paxson School Neighborhood] have a similar value system that is unlike that of any other neighborhood in Missoula." Their neighborhood is their *place*, and all residents interviewed were connected to it.

Residents identified with their neighborhood and an integral part of it is Paxson School. When they thought their school was threatened, they perceived a threat to their neighborhood identity. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) propose some threats to the

physical environment can be perceived as threats to identity. That is indeed true in this case. Paxson School is such an integral part of the neighborhood identity, that the threat of loss of the school spurred residents to do something about this and thus prevent a deterioration of their identity. Residents mobilized in an effort to have their voices heard and save their school and their neighborhood. Castells (1983) calls this a defense of cultural-territorial identity. It wasn't just about the school, it was about protecting the neighborhood and allowing the area to remain a neighborhood.

Individuals were effective in coming together and branching out to form new connections. Residents with desirable skills that weren't initially involved in meeting about the school were asked to participate. People were brought together and they networked through each other, making the needed contacts. The domain framework presented by Manzo and Perkins (2006) helps to examine connections on various scales. The rebuild can be considered a neighborhood level economic investment. Conditions in all domains - at the individual, the organizational and the neighborhood scales - were met. Residents involved with the rebuild met the characteristics corresponding to the physical, the social, the political and the economic domains. The social groups had residential organizations, networking and social cohesion that led to an empowered organization that was able to fundraise to support the mobilization effort. The neighborhood had a physical need for a new school building, informal social networks and a politically powerful organization. All these resulted in the public investment of building a new school.

The themes that emerged in the interviews fit extremely well within the pyramidal outline developed by Forrest and Kearns (2001). At the time of the rebuild, residents

experienced a sense of belonging to their neighborhood, they felt safe and trusted their neighbors. Residents shared collective norms and values and utilized networks to further their interests. People had block parties and formed informal groups and organizations to further their interests and there was a strong amount of participation in neighborhood events, particularly those centered around Paxson School. And it is here that we reach the top of the pyramid: empowerment. When given a cause to fight for, or a threat against their identity, residents were empowered and got involved to initiate change.

From interviews with newer residents, it is not clear that all the above domains are still present with neighborhood residents. Safety, for instance, is perceived by some to have deteriorated in recent years. Residents still share a strong sense of belonging to the neighborhood, but if there isn't a strong sense of safety, there isn't really a foundation to build upon to reach the empowerment stage of the pyramid.

There is a cyclic demographic nature to a neighborhood: there are periods where there are a lot of school aged children, and periods where there aren't so many. In the years leading up to the rebuild of Paxson School, there were record numbers of elementary-aged children at Paxson. Shortly following the rebuild, the numbers at Paxson declined. That is the nature of a neighborhood. Currently, the Paxson School Neighborhood doesn't have large numbers of elementary-aged children, but some residents feel that in the next few years, that will change. There is a large number of children younger than school aged who will be attending Paxson soon.

Residents viewed their school as important to their neighborhood, but also identified other desirable characteristics to their neighborhood, such as its walkability, the spatial relationship of the houses to the street and the idea that front porches create a way

to interact with fellow residents and become a part of the neighborhood. The physical characteristics of the neighborhood are in line with new urbanism design principles. Perhaps these characteristics helped to create a tightly knit community that was able to mobilize when threatened.

I asked a few residents if they believed the outcome of rebuilding Paxson would be the same if this were to happen today. They didn't think so. I would have to agree. Something has changed in the neighborhood between when the school was rebuilt and today. Whether that is due to the smaller population of elementary-aged children currently in the neighborhood, or some other factor, is yet to be determined.

Paxson School Value

Paxson School is highly valued by neighborhood residents. It is part of the "greatness" of their neighborhood. It allows their children to grow and become empowered within the safety of their neighborhood and school. Their children are given every opportunity to develop a high social capital as defined by Forrest and Kearns (2001). The children grow up feeling as they belong. It is their neighborhood and their school and they are able to walk, often without an adult, as they please. There is a sense of safety in the neighborhood and children know who lives in what house and where they can go should they need help. Children experience trust. Trust in their neighbors and their friends. The neighborhood children grow up experiencing a collective value system and people support each other. People come together for common purposes and participate in the neighborhood and school gatherings. All the neighborhood children have this opportunity, but perhaps it was the children at Paxson School during the rebuild that have gained the most. A school is just about the center of the world for a child, and it is these

children that saw the neighborhood come together and raise the support of the community to give them a better school building. They experienced an empowerment in helping to design the new school, and that will stay with them the rest of their lives.

In some interviews, it became apparent that the interviewee had been actively involved with a private school in the Missoula community and at one time their children had attended private school. While there are many reasons for children to attend private school, it is not often that parents decide to move their children to the local elementary school, yet in at least two cases, that is what happened. In these cases, the parents decided that they wanted their children to experience the neighborhood school and the sense of community that came with attending a neighborhood school.

The Difference Between Paxson and Other Missoula Schools

So it all comes back to the question of why the rebuild of Paxson was successful. And the simple answer is the parents. The parents took the issue out of the hands of the district, a unit of local government, and through their grassroots organizing efforts got the support of the Missoula community. It helped that the School Board was open to a change at Paxson and that the superintendent liked the architect's idea of a neighborhood charrette. All those things worked together to get Paxson rebuilt.

The district at the time wasn't looking to close the entire school. There were record numbers of students in the area. They were looking to do something, probably leaning toward keeping a few grades at Paxson and busing other grades to other facilities. But the whole school was able to remain together through rebuilding. That is what makes this unique from other schools. It was rebuilt on the same site.

All schools have supportive parents. That is a given. But what made Paxson stand out in the minds of the school officials were the community members and neighborhood residents, without children at Paxson, that were coming to the Paxson meetings. Paxson School, unlike other Missoula schools, has outstanding support from neighborhood members. Neighborhood residents with no children or children older than those at Paxson at the time of the rebuild where not included in this study and perhaps that is a flaw. Their's would have been an interesting perspective.

CONCLUSION

"A moment I remember most is the old school being knocked down.
I didn't want it to happen, but I know it was for the better." Chris

This study indicates that the neighborhood is a useful unit in terms of community

planning. Various forms of capital are necessary considerations at any scale of planning.

Neighborhood residents may form attachments to place, develop a sense of community,

participate in neighborhood politics and make monetary investments in their

neighborhood. Residents may also identify with their neighborhood through a shared

collective identity with the common place. This neighborhood identity may contribute to

resident activism and an organizing of an empowered group. All of these things are

important considerations for planners.

The physical characteristics of this neighborhood, such as sidewalks and houses

with front porches, and the relatively close proximity of services that encourage residents

to walk, may all contribute to a greater sense of belonging in the neighborhood. People

are able to get out and see their neighbors by walking through their neighborhood and the

simple act of walking encourages and interaction with the physical environment.

Interaction, with both the physical and social environment, promotes emotional

attachment, one of the characteristics of the development of place identity (Cuba and

Humman 1993). The simple location of this neighborhood in relation to the surrounding

Missoula area may contribute the neighborhood identity, of which a strong part is

centered around Paxson School.

The planning discipline is inherently a compilation of many disciplines. The

literature basis for this study drew from sociology, geography, psychology and political

science. Cornerstone papers for this research from Forrest and Kearns (2001) and Manzo and Perkins (2006), alone indicate that the planning field takes a collaboration of scholars and a crossing of disciplines. Forrest, from Political Studies and Kearns, from Urban Studies came together to develop an outline of social capital domains needed for empowerment. Manzo, in the field of Architecture and Planning, collaborated with Perkins from Psychology to produce a framework of capital on various scales. These two works were extremely important for understanding individual actions within a neighborhood context in this study. If anything, this study reenforces the need for researchers to collaborate outside their discipline to further understand the interactions of human beings with their surrounding environments.

Because the study area had a high rate of homeownership and high levels of social capital, the results of this study may not be reproducible in other areas where homeownership is lower and residents are not as actively involved in neighborhood activities.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was sample size. While an effort was made to talk with people involved with the rebuild of Paxson, there were far more people involved than I was able to interview as is evidenced by the interview web found in Appendix D. I would have loved to have been able to talk with more individuals, and perhaps even the children that attended Paxson School during the process, who would be in their twenties now. Additionally, the sample was limited to those individuals that had children at Paxson. The neighborhood residents and non-parents that came to the meetings about rebuilding Paxson were not included in this study. This and the small

sample size restrict the researcher's ability to form a complete picture of the neighborhood. The support of the bond issue implies school value. The combined response of interviewed residents with the financial support of the bond issue resulted in the conclusion of the school's value to the neighborhood.

In addition to sampling issues, another major limitation of the study was the amount of time that had passed since the rebuilding of Paxson School. Previous studies have shown that with increased age, there is increased difficulty in memory retrieval of episodic events (Balota, Dolan and Duchek 2000). Many participants struggled to recall details surrounding the rebuild of Paxson School. A few talked about a survey of the neighborhood that was presented to the School District. This was unverified due to incomplete memory of participants, and quite possibly the inability to identify key people involved with the survey, and the lack of supporting documentation.

There was a great deal of time between this study and the rebuild of Paxson School, and that can be seen as both a disadvantage and an advantage. It is a disadvantage due to the limiting effects of age on memory recall. But time has an advantage in studies comparing the neighborhood at two periods of time. While that was not specifically done in this research, the study did try to determine if there was a great difference in the neighborhood that worked to rebuild the school, and the neighborhood today. The neighborhood still cares very much for its school. It is not the same neighborhood as it was twenty years ago, however, Paxson school is still an integral part of the neighborhood and its identity.
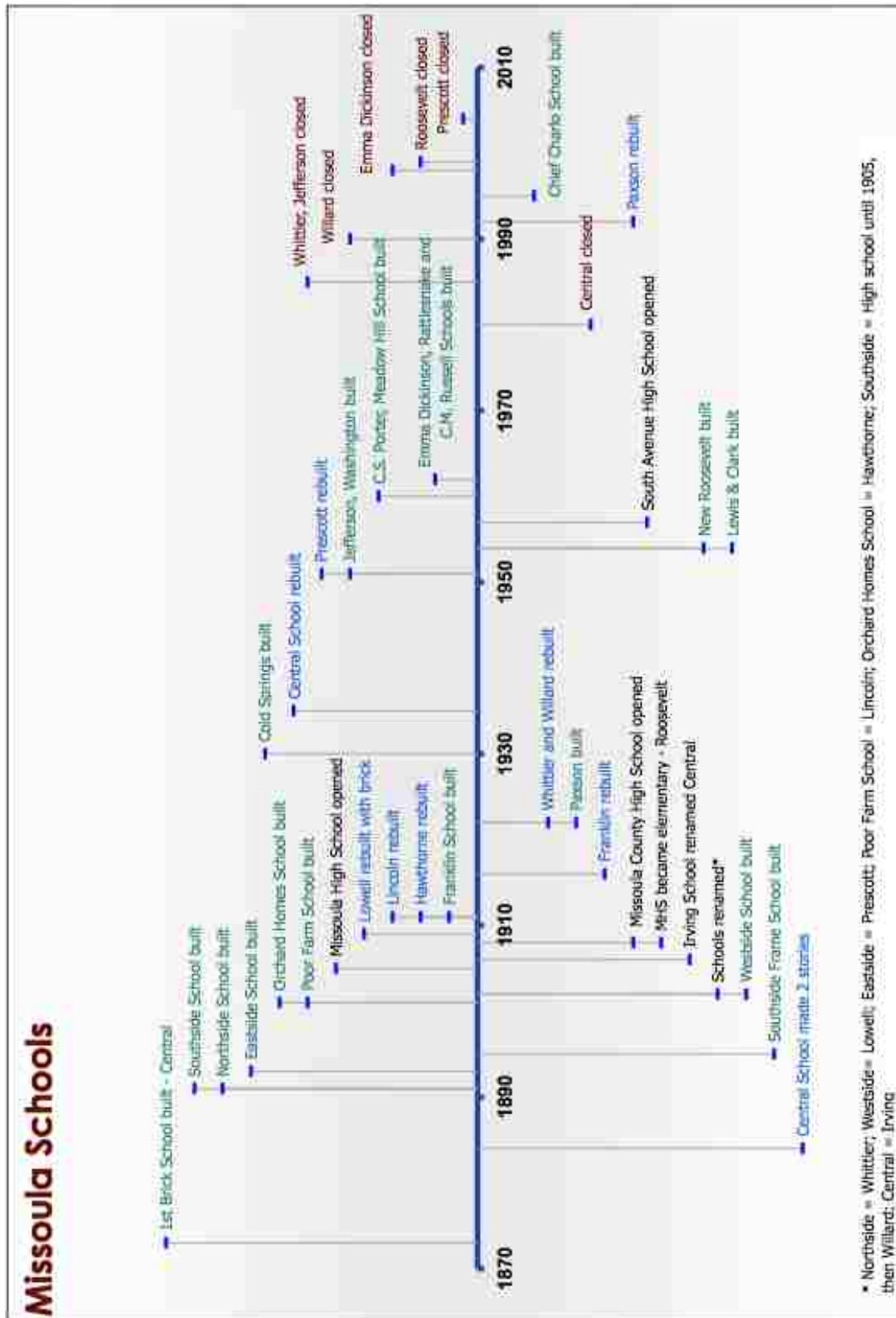
Further Considerations

Paxson School Neighborhood residents were empowered to protect their neighborhood identity and worked to save their school from the perceived threat of closure. The neighborhood effectively mobilized against this threat. Further research is needed in the area of neighborhood identity and threats of change. Additional research to uncover the relationship between changes in the physical environment and a perceived threat to identity is also warranted.

The influence of a school on its neighborhood is not taken into account by school facility planners, nor is it understood by school districts. City planners may understand the importance of a neighborhood, but are rarely involved in school siting decisions. There needs to be a partnership of some sort between school districts and urban planners that will allow for a greater understanding of city wide planning with an incorporated school district plan that allows neighborhoods to remain neighborhoods with neighborhood schools. Changing the pattern in which schools can be built will have a great influence on the growth of the city. Educating neighborhoods on the benefits of a neighborhood school will result in an invested neighborhood, a sense of neighborhood ownership of the school and a foundation to mobilize should a threat to the school develop.

Along the lines of new urbanist design, further research is needed with regard to the physical spaces impact on the sense of community experienced by local residents. To what extent is the physical space a determinant for neighborhood cohesiveness and the development of a neighborhood identity? This could be an interesting collaboration

between planning and sociology or psychology and could further build upon the work of

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996).

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF MISSOULA SCHOOLS

Missoula Schools

Timeline years: 1870, 1890, 1910, 1930, 1950, 1970, 1990, 2010

1st Brick School built - Central

Southside School built
Northside School built
Eastside School built

Orchard Homes School built
Poor Farm School built
Missoula High School opened
Lowell rebuilt with brick
Lincoln rebuilt
Hawthorne rebuilt
Franklin School built

Cold Springs built
Central School rebuilt
Prescott rebuilt
Jefferson, Washington built

Whittier, Jefferson closed
Willard closed
Emma Dickinson closed
Roosevelt closed
Prescott closed

C.S. Porter, Meadow Hill School built
Emma Dickinson, Rattlesnake and
C.M. Russell Schools built

Chief Charlo School built
Paxson rebuilt

Central closed

South Avenue High School opened

New Roosevelt built
Lewis & Clark built

Missoula County High School opened
MHS became elementary - Roosevelt
Irving School renamed Central

Whittier and Willard rebuilt
Paxson built
Franklin rebuilt

Schools renamed*
Westside School built
Southside Frame School built

Central School made 2 stories

* Northside = Whittier; Westside = Lowell; Eastside = Prescott; Poor Farm School = Lincoln; Orchard Homes School = Hawthorne; Southside = High school until 1905, then Willard; Central = Irving

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Instructions to the Interviewer:
- Check tape
- Record the following:
  - Date
  - Location

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am interested in learning about the rebuilding of Paxson Elementary School and the Paxson School Neighborhood.

I would like to tape this interview to make sure your views are accurately recorded.

Is that okay with you? IF YES, TURN ON THE RECORDER.

As I just asked, is it okay to tape this interview?

Informed Consent:

Before we begin, I want to let you know that your identity as a participant in this study will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any presentation or written reports. You may end the interview at anytime. If you have questions in the future, you have my contact information and may contact me at anytime. Do you voluntarily agree to take part in this study?

Demographics
1. How long have you been in the neighborhood?

2. Do you own or rent?
   What year did you buy or begin renting?

3. What is your profession?

4. Do you have kids?
   How many?
   What schools do/did they attend?

Neighborhood Contributions
5. Do/Did you know your neighbors?

6. Are/Were you involved in neighborhood activities?
   What kind?

7. Are/Were you involved with the PTA?

8. Is there a sense of community in your neighborhood?
   How so?

9. Was there this sense of community leading up to the rebuild of Paxson Elementary? *(not applicable for newer residents)*
Do you use Paxson Elementary for any purpose?

Paxson Elementary

10. Do you remember when Paxson Elementary was rebuilt? (*Did you know that Paxson Elementary was rebuilt? What do you know about it?*)
What do you remember?

11. How was the issue of rebuilding raised? *(not applicable for newer residents)*
Were you involved with _____? How?
How did neighborhood residents affect the decision to rebuild?

12. Paxson Elementary had been closed and not rebuilt, would you have moved from the area? *(…would you have moved to the area?)*
Why? *(What attracted you to this area?)*

Neighborhood Satisfaction

13. Did you feel connected to your neighborhood in the years leading up to the rebuild? *(not applicable for newer residents)*
How so?
Do you feel connected to your neighborhood now?
Do you feel more connected or less connected to your neighborhood now as opposed to then? *(not applicable for newer residents)*

14. For Missoula as a whole, was rebuilding Paxson the right decision?
Why?

15. For your neighborhood, was rebuilding Paxson the right decision?
Why?

16. What does the school bring to the neighborhood?
Is _____ important to the neighborhood?
Why?
Was this why the school was rebuilt?

17. Is there anything else you want to say?

Wrap up.
Thanks for your time. As I transcribe this interview, if I have any question, may I call you? Also, if you would like to see a copy of the transcript, I would be happy to send you one. Thanks once again for your time.

Section 2: For individuals involved in other school closures in the Missoula Community. The above questions will be modified to reflect the different school name and generally the word "rebuild" will be replaced with "closed."

13. Was the issue of residents' attachment to schools and the role of schools in neighborhoods an important factor in school closures in Missoula? How so?

14. For Missoula as a whole, was rebuilding Paxson the right decision? Why?

15. For the Paxson School Neighborhood, was rebuilding the right decision? Why?

16. What does the school bring to the neighborhood?
    Is _____ important to the neighborhood?
    Why?
    Was this why the school was rebuilt?

17. Is there anything else you want to say?

APPENDIX C: NEW PAXSON BUILDING FLOOR PLAN

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW WEB
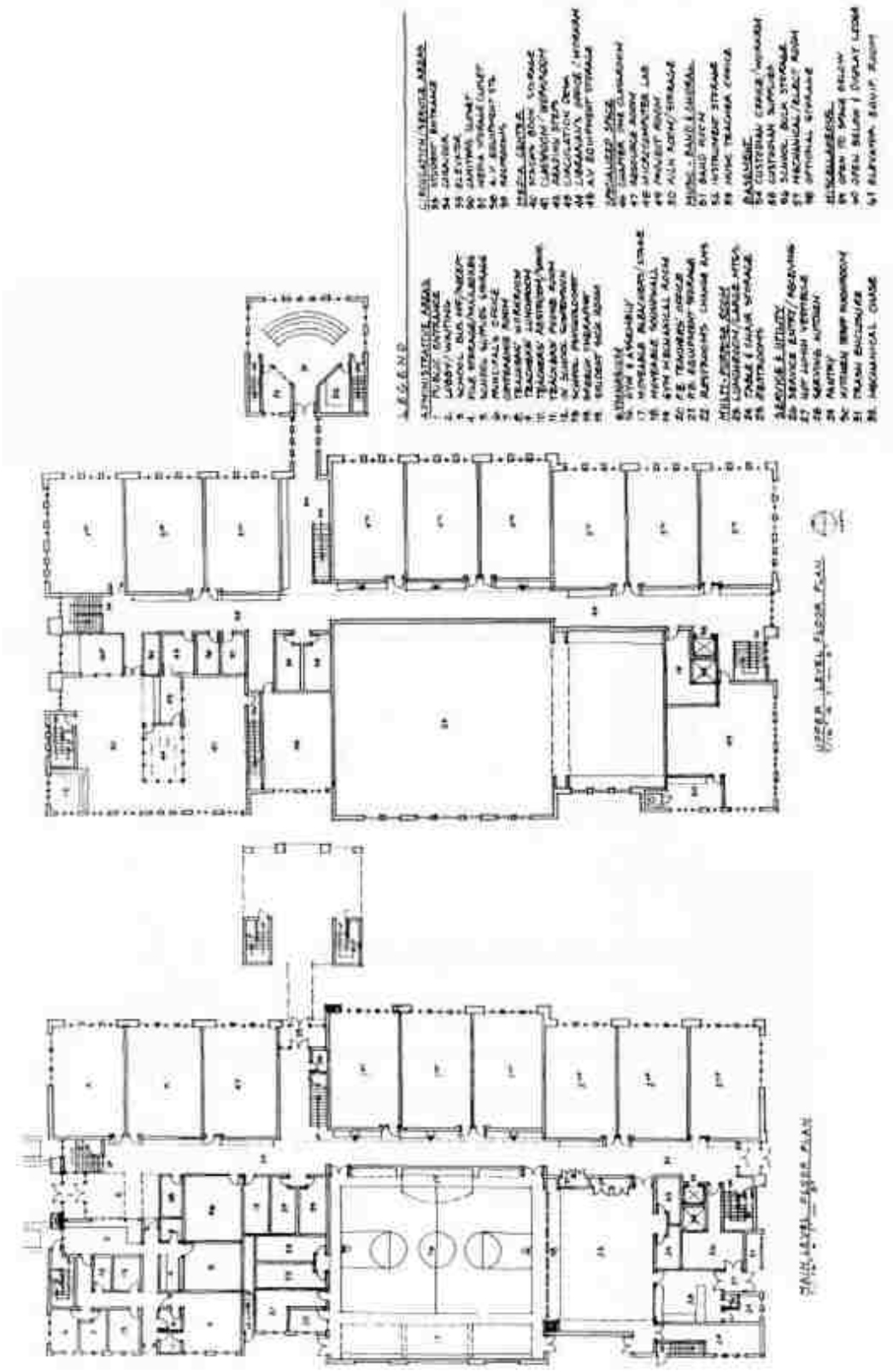
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