

Happy Valley Parent/Community Update and Input Meeting
September 16, 2014

6:00 p.m.

Leading the meeting: Karen Tolliver, Happy Valley Principal
Ron Cowan, Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations
Kevin Flannigan, NAC/Architecture
Matt Rumbaugh, NAC/Architecture

Approximately 40 parents and neighbors attended. Several committee members, Superintendent Greg Baker, Executive Team Members Steve Clark, Mike Copland, Ron Cowan, Kurt Gazow, Rob McElroy, Tanya Rowe and school board director Camille Diaz Hackler.

Committee Members in attendance: Mike Anderson, Tara Aperule, Jill Dejong, Mike D'Hondt, Kurt Gazow, Gretchen Howard, Wendy Scherrer, LaVonne Sterling-Chue.

Happy Valley Principal Karen Tolliver opened the meeting at 6 p.m. and welcomed everyone. Karen expressed her excitement for the new school and introduced Superintendent Greg Baker, asked the design committee to identify themselves by raising their hands, and then introduced Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan.

Ron thanked the group for coming to hear about the building of Happy Valley. He shared the excitement about the recent opening of Birchwood Elementary School and how Happy Valley will get to experience this in two years and how the project of building a new school benefits the entire community.

Ron described the guiding principles used in a project like this:

- Build highly functional, safe, healthy efficient buildings that provide strong support to the district's primary mission of teaching and learning.
- Devote as much of the project budget as possible to spaces that support this primary mission of teaching and learning.
- The separation of bus and school auto traffic to some degree is a must. The district has several schools where autos use a separate street from buses to access the school site.
- Use existing public infrastructure as much as possible and build as little new infrastructure as possible in order to devote as much of the project budget as possible to spaces that support the primary mission of teaching and learning.
- Develop property following all of the required rules and regulations.
- Be a good neighbor to the best of our ability in light of competing interests

Ron introduced Kevin Flannigan and Matt Rumbaugh of NAC Architecture.

Kevin introduced himself and indicated he would talk about the building plan, building form, site design and next steps.

He described the last community input meeting in July and recapped the process for planning the new school, which is guided by The Bellingham Promise. He described next steps in October/November: Technical development of the design details and said they hope to get to permitting around December. He said they hope to go to bid in April and then by the end of this school year construction will begin. By August of 2016 the new building will be completed and move in will happen followed by the demolition of the current building.

Kevin described more about the process and talked about integrating the Larrabee community into the community. He then showed a slide of their goals and then turned the presentation over to Matt Rumbaugh.

Matt Rumbaugh described proposed building plans and then asked if there were questions from the audience at this point.

- Is the library the only thing on the second floor?
 - No, there are other classrooms on the second floor as well.

Matt then continued to talk about the building form and shared a drawing. He said that while the drawing looks finished, it is not yet. Matt then showed a photo of a building and described how it looks plain from the outside but dynamic on the inside, then showed some pictures of where they left off in July and an example of a school in Bellevue. He also described the proposed design's connection to the proximity of WWU and the renowned sculpture art on campus.

Questions/input from the audience:

- A neighbor expressed concern that too much of this meeting is being spent on the architecture of the school and not enough time to concentrate on the traffic safety issues related to the site plans.
 - Ron Cowan indicated that the meeting was advertised as a project update and asked for a show of hands of those who weren't at the July meeting. Several people raised their hands. He said they would get to the site plan, which included traffic, if they could continue with the presentation.

Matt continued, saying he would make the presentation brief and asked if there were any questions about the building form.

- Question about energy efficiency.
 - Matt said they would use the same energy efficiency standards as Cordata Elementary School which currently is the most energy efficient school in the district.
- Will there be energy generation on site?
 - Matt said the committee has spent time exploring the option of a large solar array and at this time that this isn't being recommended. However, they are looking at a smaller array and possibly incorporating it into the curriculum.
- If large solar panels aren't feasible now, can the school be wired so solar energy can be used in the future?

- Matt: Yes, they can do prep work so it can be added in the future.
- A question about heating water:
 - Matt said they did not have an answer yet, but it has not been ruled out.
- Is there going to be a covered play area or covered area to park bicycles?
 - Matt said yes to the covered play area but they aren't certain about the covered bike area yet. Birchwood has a covered bike parking area.
- A neighbor asked if the team has been out to the school on garbage day to see how the truck takes over the entire road.
 - Matt: Not yet, but garbage trucks and passing buses are on their radar as a concern of neighbors.

Ron Cowan then talked about the input meeting in July where much concern was expressed about traffic. He said it was suggested that the BPS staff sit down with city/public works and said that they did this.

SITE DESIGN

Kevin showed an aerial view of the site design then showed a video taken during the afternoon pick up at Happy Valley. We need to improve student safety during pick-up and drop off.

He described Shuksan Middle School's design that separates autos and buses, by having buses use one street (West Maplewood) and autos a different street (Alderwood) and showed two video clips of the Shuksan pick up/drop off.

- A question was asked about the width of the streets near Shuksan.
 - Ron acknowledged difference in the streets, but said the example demonstrated the effectiveness of separating buses and autos.

Kevin showed the original site plan that was presented in July for community input. He described concerns that were expressed at that time by neighbors and then showed another slide of the current preferred site plan that has been modified based on the July input. He said there were concerns expressed about the original plan and the amount of car and bus traffic on 27th Street and Mill Avenue. The current preferred site plan decreases staff parking in the back of the school to approximately 7 spaces. The preferred site plans addresses the concerns of safety and reflects some of the neighbors' feedback.

[Preferred Plan](#)
[Alternative Plan A](#)
[Alternative Plan B](#)

- Is there less playground space than we have now with Alternate #2?
 - Yes.
- A neighbor said parents park on Mill in his front yard to walk to the school to pick up? Will this change?

- Kevin responded that parents don't want to go where there is congestion, so they park elsewhere. The preferred plan will reduce congestion decreasing the likelihood of parents parking on Mill.
- A neighbor agreed that distracted parents are a problem and has concerns about parents taking a shortcut down Mill; they are concerned not about the bus drivers but distracted parents.
- How much playground is necessary? A neighbor says not many people use it. Can we get away with less?
 - Karen Tolliver, Happy Valley Principal said they see the playground used all the time. She said it is as much a community area as a school area. She said having a usable space and having a green area is important.
- How much play area is necessary?
 - The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) recommends 10 acres for an entire elementary school site; this site is 8 acres, so the site is already smaller than the OSPI recommended size. OSPI does not have play field size recommendations.
- Concern about parents racing down Mill. What will keep them from taking the back door into the school?
 - Kevin responded: Making the front door so that you can get in more easily. There are other strategies such as signage, staff supervision and locked doors.
 - Ron suggested parent education as well: Having staff at the bus drop off area telling auto drivers that the area is for buses only.
- Will the back doors be locked?
 - Kevin. Yes
 - Ron: Some walkers, depending on where they live, may want to access the school on the east side near 27th.
- A neighbor is hoping for a pedestrian bicycle way. With all of the bike and pedestrian traffic it would be nice to have a permanent safe path. Maybe a viaduct over the road.
- A teacher at Wade King described the parent pick up/drop off area there and said she can't believe how well it works. The kids are truly in and out very quickly. It was mentioned that the key to this success includes parent volunteers.
- Recently, a number of neighbors signed a petition requesting a traffic study and wondered what came of that.
 - Ron responded: The petition really helped us and encouraged the committee to look at different plans, which they have done. Ron said he talked to city staff about the plans and their response is that a traffic plan/study is not necessary. Ron said the city planners said the impact of the traffic was minimal. They told BPS that the traffic will be placed on streets that are currently under capacity and that these roads are designed for more traffic (Mill and 27th). Overall, as a result of looking at the options, the Preferred Site Plan makes even more sense.
- Can you design the building differently to take up less space?
 - Kevin: There are certain things that need to take place on the first floor of the building.
 - Ron: It all goes back to what our priorities are – teaching and learning.
- A neighbor said they wished we had this discussion months ago
 - There have been three community meetings (April 21, July 21, and tonight).

- A neighbor commented that when you say 3 to 5 buses and 7 cars will access the back of the school using Mill and 27th streets, we don't believe you.
- A Happy Valley parent said she doesn't live on 27th or Mill but at Padden Creek apartments. She thinks drop off is dangerous now and prefers the plan that separates the drop off and pick up. She just moved here and doesn't know the short-cuts, so doesn't use them.
- There were questions about a sidewalk in the back of the school.
 - It will likely be required by the city and we want to make these type of improvements where we can.
- There was a question about a piece of property that was thought to have been purchased by the school district adjacent to the school.
 - Ron said the district does not own the property.
- Another Mill Avenue resident described a time when a garbage truck went in his yard and said it would be difficult for a garbage truck and a school bus to pass each other on Mill. He said it would be a challenge for a bus turning onto 24th Street from Mill Avenue if there was a car parked at the intersection.
- A teacher at Happy Valley spoke to the issue of the current chaos of the drop-off / pick-up every day at Happy Valley. She said this was the worst part of her entire day.
- Another audience member responded that no one disagrees with this, but said Mill Avenue is not an arterial, but 24th Street is an arterial and traffic should be kept on the arterial.
 - Ron said he checked with the city of Bellingham and they indicated 24th (North of Harris, in front of the school) is not an arterial.
- Another audience member completely agreed saying the plan makes it safer for kids on campus but more difficult for traffic on Mill. By diverting school buses coming to school property onto Mill, we have the same concerns you are talking about on school property, but now on Mill Avenue.
- A neighbor said they cannot emphasize it more, 24th street is busy. It is also busy on Mill Avenue. This is not an ideal situation because it is not safe for the kids and not safe for people living in that area. We don't want anything coming down that road because it's not safe.
- A neighbor said, I applaud you separating buses from cars, but you are kind of ignoring Mill and 24th Street safety concerns because you are focusing on safety concerns on your own property. I have a ditch on one side of the road and my house on the other.
 - Kevin: Mill & 24th has been looked at. Currently there are cars that back up on 24th to Mill. That creates a poor situation because of the congestion. The new, long drop-off/pick up area will significantly decrease or eliminate that back up and congestion.
- Neighbors expressed concern that the decision has been made and urged the committee to consider the options.
 - Ron responded that in terms of whether we have made up our mind, we are really trying to be transparent in labeling the plans "Preferred" and "Alternative" rather than having them appear as equals by labeling them site plans "A", "B", and "C". We really haven't made up our minds, although we have a current preference, and are trying to be sensitive to concerns raised.

- Is there an easement on Mill to widen the street? It seems so much more effective and efficient. It is dangerous – yes. I drive my student.
 - Ron: When we talked to the city about improvements, Mill was not required to be improved. 27th might be required to be improved.
- Which plan would reduce the amount of traffic on Mill? Since this is a hot button issue?
 - Kevin said that the preferred has fewer traffic motions
- Another audience member expressed concern about having school buses going down residential streets.
 - Ron responded that we have school buses safely traveling down residential sites all over the district.

Ron described the next steps.

- Comments are being recorded and meeting minutes will be posted online.
- Please fill out the blue feedback form and return it to us.
- Deadline to return is Monday, September 22 at noon.
- The comments will be compiled and shared with the committee and posted online.

In October the committee will make a recommendation to the superintendent regarding schematic design, site plan, and floor plans. The Design committee and architects will continue to work on the building.

Ron encouraged people to go to the website to see project information, meeting minutes and presentations.

Ron said he knew this was hard for everyone. We are trying to do the best job we can for a solution for everyone and hoped that people would see that BPS has been genuine in their process.

The meeting ended at 7:27 p.m.