



Happy Valley Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee Recommendation: Addendum

Since July 21, 2014, neighbors in the vicinity of Mill Avenue and 27th Street have raised a number of concerns regarding the Happy Valley Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee's preferred site plan for the new Happy Valley Elementary School. During a subsequent public input meeting on Sept. 16, 2014, neighbors requested that Bellingham Public Schools gather and share information and data in response to the expressed concerns. This addendum to the committee's recommendation contains the requested data and information, and describes the actions taken by Bellingham Public Schools to help address and alleviate the concerns.

1. **Concern:** Mill Avenue and 27th Street are not wide enough to safely accommodate buses and other vehicles when pedestrians are present.

Action:

- a. We reviewed bus routes in other parts of the district to analyze street widths compared to Mill and 27th streets.
 - i. Mill Street is approximately 21 ½ feet wide and 27th Street is approximately 22 feet wide. Examples of a few similar streets in the district with no sidewalks and where buses travel and students walk a short distance along them include:
 1. Nevada St., 17 ft. 8 in.
 2. Roland St., 20 ft.
 3. Whatcom, 17ft.
 4. Freemont, 20 ft.
 5. Lakeview, 19 ft.
 6. Martin St., 18ft. 6 in.
 7. Crown Ln., 16 ft.
 8. Xenia St.,17 ft. 3 in.
 9. Carolina St., 13 ft. 10 in.
 10. Cowgill, 15 ft.
 11. Bayside, 17 ft. 9 in.
 12. Briar, 17 ft. 6 in.

13. 24th between Fairhaven Pkwy & Donovan, 18ft. 4 in.

- b. After reviewing the proposed plan and visiting the site, Rae Anne Thon, Director of Transportation, indicates: *Visibility is good on Mill and 27th and will not be a concern especially for a bus driver who sits high in the bus. Although there are no sidewalks, there are adequate shoulder/grass areas and good driveway access points where pedestrians can walk, or wait as vehicles move past if necessary. From my perspective, neighbors, bus drivers, sanitary service drivers, pedestrians, etc. will work together to ensure a safe environment on these streets just as they do in other similar situations throughout our school district. I am confident our buses will safely navigate these roads.*
 - c. It should be noted that with the preferred site plan students who live on 27th Street or Mill Avenue will be able to access the school from 27th Street, an improvement over their current walk route to Happy Valley.
2. **Concern:** Too many parking stalls in parking lot off of 27th Street will increase traffic on Mill and 27th.

Action: The current preferred site plan was altered between July and September 2014 to reduce the number of parking stalls in the lot off of 27th Street from 25 stalls (June 6 and 16 site plan) to 7 stalls (current preferred site plan).

3. **Concern:** Even a small parking lot off of 27th Street will lead to more traffic on 27th.

Action:

- a. Signage, gates and staff supervision at the bus drop-off area will deter parking in the proposed bus loop and 7-stall parking area. Eastside building doors will be locked except during the morning bus drop-off time reducing the attractiveness of the bus loop being used by others. Staff supervising the area will send parents who attempt to drop off children by car to the front of the school. In schools where this model is currently in place, parents quickly learn that attempting to drop-off children in the bus area is not allowed and is a waste of time compared to the efficiency of an effective car-only, drop-off loop.
4. **Concern:** There will be conflicts between buses and Sanitary Service Company (SSC) vehicles (garbage and recycling).

Action:

- a. According to staff at Sanitary Service Company (SSC):
 - i. We can coexist on both Mill and 27th and there is room for SSC trucks and buses to pass each other if we happened to encounter each other at the same time.
 - ii. **School Food Plus pick up:**

1. Friday approx. 7:30 a.m.
 - a. Buses currently arrive at approx. 8:05 a.m. and depart at approximately 8:20 a.m.
 - b. There is no school on 13 Fridays during the school year.

iii. Neighborhood Garbage:

1. Light Weeks: Friday approximately 9 a.m.
 - a. Buses currently arrive at approximately. 8:05 a.m. and depart at approximately 8:20 a.m.
 - b. There is no school on 13 Fridays during the school year.
 - c. There would be no students walking on Mill or 27th at 9 a.m.
2. Heavy Weeks: Friday approx. 12 noon
 - a. Mid-day bus currently arrives at approximately. 11 a.m. and departs at approximately 11:10 a.m.
 - b. Mid-day bus currently arrives at approximately 12:20 p.m. and departs at approximately 12:30 p.m.
 - c. There is no school on 13 Fridays during the school year
 - d. There would be no students walking on Mill or 27th at noon.

iv. Neighborhood Curbside Recycle:

1. Friday between 1:30-3:30 p.m.
 - a. Buses currently arrive at approximately 2:55 p.m. and depart at approximately 3:20 p.m.
 - b. There is no school on 13 Fridays during the school year

b. Rae Anne Thon, Director of Transportation states: *Our drivers are trained to safely respond to situations should they encounter a large vehicle when pedestrians are present*

5. **Concern:** The proposed plans had not been reviewed with City of Bellingham staff.

Action:

- a. We have had numerous conversations with City staff
- b. Meetings were held with City staff on:
 - i. September 25, 2014 (Superintendent Greg Baker, Ron Cowan, Tanya Rowe)
 - ii. October 7, 2014 – Formal Pre-Application meeting where City staff provided their input and conveyed requirements associated with the project, including each of the three site plans to district staff and the design team. This includes planning department, fire department and public works.
 - iii. In terms of traffic the City stated:
 1. No traffic study required.
 2. No sidewalk improvements are recommended for Mill Ave or 27th Street.

3. Crosswalk improvements are recommended at Mill and 24th. *(These improvements are identified as part of the City's 2012 Pedestrian Master Plan (July 2012) and is prioritized as a Tier 1 (short term) improvement. It is the City's desire to complete this project in summer 2016).*
4. Mill Avenue is approximately 21 ½ feet wide.
5. 27th Street is approximately 22 feet wide.
6. For approximately 15-30 minutes each morning and afternoon, the private vehicles of parents dropping-off or picking-up students line the east side of 21 ½ foot-wide 24th Street and create significant traffic congestion, school bus-vehicle conflicts, WTA bus-vehicle conflicts, and pedestrian-vehicle conflicts.
7. Adequate sight distance exists at all intersections.
8. WTA routes experience delays when vehicles line up on 24th for drop-off/pick-up.
9. Preferred Site Plan
 - a. The proposed loop parking/drop-off/pick up are would help to relieve congestion on 24th Street and increase safety for students.
 - b. Separating school bus traffic from vehicle traffic on 24th Street would eliminate driveway cuts on 24th Street and would improve safety by reducing bus-vehicle conflicts and allowing for a continuous accessible sidewalk to the primary school entrance and a better pedestrian environment for the neighborhood.
 - c. Both Mill Avenue and 27th Street have extremely low traffic volumes and are both capable of handling the traffic associated with the proposed school buses and low number of private vehicles.
10. Site Plan B
 - a. The proposed loop parking/drop-off/pick up are would help to relieve congestion on 24th Street and increase safety for students.
 - b. Leaving the existing school bus drop-off/pick-up loop on 24th Street maintains a discontinuous sidewalk along the property frontage, maintains existing pedestrian-vehicle conflict, and maintains bus-vehicle conflict by not separating school bus traffic from vehicle traffic on 24th Street.
11. Site Plan C
 - a. The proposed loop parking/drop-off/pick up are would help to relieve congestion on 24th Street and increase safety for students.
 - b. Building a new school bus drop-off/pick-up driveway on 24th Street maintains a discontinuous sidewalk along the property frontage, maintains existing pedestrian-vehicle

conflict, and maintains bus-vehicle conflict by not separate school bus traffic from vehicle traffic on 24th Street.

- c. The construction of a long driveway on the north edge of the property appears to be redundant, unnecessary, and overly impactful to the site while there is excess transportation capacity on Mill Avenue and 27th Street, which are under-utilized public streets.

- c. Review the intersection at Mill and 24th with City staff
 - i. There are no sight distance issues (see pre-app. meeting summary #7 above).

6. **Concern:** Neighbors requested a formal traffic study.

Action:

- a. There is no statutory requirement for a traffic study.
- b. Nonetheless, the district commissioned a traffic study with Heffron Transportation. Heffron Transportation has provided transportation assistance to more than 20 public school districts as well as private schools throughout the Puget Sound region related to the planning of new schools and remodeling or renovation of existing schools. Their team, including a transportation engineer, evaluated the existing conditions during both the morning arrival and afternoon dismissal periods. Observations, combined with vehicle and pedestrian counts, were performed during both periods. In addition, City of Bellingham count and speed data were also obtained and reviewed.
 - i. Based on this information and elements provided by the Institute of Transportation Engineers for development and implementation of *Safe Routes to Schools*, the following criteria are frequently used to provide safer and more efficient vehicle, bus, and pedestrian/bicyclists facilities and operations:
 1. Separate pedestrian, vehicle, and bus movements as much possible
 2. Provide pedestrian facilities
 3. Provide maximum parent-vehicle drop-off/pick-up and queuing space
 4. Provide on-site bus loading/unloading
 5. Provide on-site parking
 6. Provide signage at the site access driveways
 7. Ensure sight distance is available for each driveway
 - ii. The Heffron study included an analysis of the 3 proposed site plans based on their observations, data and the above criteria and concluded that the Preferred Plan contains the most elements associated with providing safer and more efficient vehicle, bus, and pedestrian/bicyclists facilities and operations as summarized in Table 1 below.

iii. Based on improvement needs identified from existing observations and data collection, and using the criteria listed previously as a base; Table 1 shows how each plan compares to the needs identified. The following are shown:

- ◆◆◆ – Adequate design and improvement achieved
- ◆◆ – Some improvement achieved
- ◆ – Improvement limited based on design

Table 1. Happy Valley Site Plan Comparisons

Criteria	Preferred Plan	Option A Plan	Option B Plan
Separate modes (vehicle, bus, pedestrian) (see below)	◆◆◆	◆	◆
Pedestrian facilities (see below)	◆◆◆	◆◆	◆◆
On-site parent-vehicle drop-off/pick-up and queue space	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆
On-site bus loading/unloading & access	◆◆◆	◆	◆
On-site parking	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹
Signage	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹
Sight-distance	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹	◆◆ ¹
Total Marks	18	13	13

1 ◆◆◆ can be achieved with recommended improvements.

iv. Table 1 shows that out of the possible 21 transportation related marks, the Preferred Plan contains the most elements identified from the criteria listed with 18 marks.

7. **Concern:** More feedback is needed on the site plans.

Action: We compiled feedback print feedback forms from the Sept. 16, 2014 meeting, and gathered additional feedback from Happy Valley families and staff. The feedback is posted online at:

<https://bellingshamschools.org/sites/default/files/departments/businessop/HVFeedbackSummary091614.pdf>

A summary of the feedback includes:

- a. 45 respondents selected the current preferred site plan. This site plan separates auto traffic (off of 24th Street) and bus traffic (off of 27th Street).
 - b. 16 respondents selected the first alternative site plan. This site plan keeps auto and bus traffic on 24th Street.
 - c. 14 respondents selected the second alternative site plan. This site plan keeps auto and bus traffic separate by building a driveway/road along the northern property line.
 - d. The Sept. 16 meeting minutes are also posted online at <https://bellingshamschools.org/sites/default/files/departments/businessop/091614MeetingMinutes.pdf>
8. **Concern:** Mill and 27th Street do not have capacity to handle the proposed increased traffic.

Action:

- a. According to Heffron and the City, both Mill Avenue and 27th Street have extremely low traffic volumes and are both capable of handling the proposed school buses and low number of private vehicles.
9. **Concern:** Trees along 27th Street will need to be removed.

Action:

- a. Most of the existing trees along 27th Street will remain.

Last updated: 11.19.14