



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
FROM: Facilities Planning Task Force
DATE: February 6, 2013
RE: **Recommendation for 10-Year Facilities Plan**

Introduction

In fall 2012, Bellingham Public Schools convened a Facilities Task Force of 40 members representing staff, students, community members, parents and alumni. Our task was to identify and prioritize major facility improvement projects for Bellingham Public Schools for the next 10 years and to identify specific projects from the plan for a future bond issue to put before voters, possibly as early as spring 2013.

As a group, we spent four months analyzing and discussing facilities information. Our work focused on the facilities that have not been newly built or renovated in recent years. Specifically, we did not include Bellingham and Squalicum high schools, our four middle schools, or Cordata, Northern Heights and Wade King Elementary schools in our work. Data sources included a presentation by Educational Service District 112 consultants on their evaluation of the district's buildings, both their physical and functional condition. Our process also included first-hand observation by touring district facilities accompanied by school principals and district maintenance staff to answer specific questions. We found that while some of our schools and facilities are in great shape, there are also many buildings in critical need of attention to provide every child with a safe, healthy and highly effective learning environment. We worked together to prioritize potential projects, which we shared with the community on Nov. 30, 2013 via the district's website, email, local media and a printed brochure. We then gathered additional community input by hosting and attending four public meetings throughout the district in December, launching an online survey, and conducting a random sample telephone survey of residents living within Bellingham school attendance areas. Several of our Task Force representatives also met with City of Bellingham staff to keep them informed about our thinking, especially related to infrastructure and city planning, and seek their input. As a result of the community input, we made some modifications to the original ideas we shared on Nov. 30, which are now a part of this recommendation.

We invested a significant amount of time reviewing and discussing immediate and long-term priorities of our children and the greater community before agreeing upon this recommendation. This recommended 10-year plan does not involve acquiring more property, but strives to make the best possible use of the

land we currently own. We focused on how to build new or remodel existing neighborhood schools on existing property and to ensure that those facilities are able to meet the educational needs of students now and well into the future. The most recent facilities plans and bonds have largely focused on building new or rebuilding schools in the north and central part of our district – including Cordata, Birchwood, Shuksan, Northern Heights, Squalicum, Bellingham and Whatcom – with the exception of Wade King in the south part of the district. This recommendation would benefit all schools with some level of improvement and focuses on many dire facility issues that need to be addressed in the southside area of the school district.

The Facilities Planning Task Force recommends that the school district develop a financing plan in the near future to complete the following projects in priority order within the next 10 years at a total estimated cost of \$157 million:

1. Rebuild Sehome High School
2. Build a fourth innovative high school to serve Options and other students
3. Build a Learning Support Center/District Office
4. Partially renovate Parkview Elementary School to include a new gym and cafeteria, and address the needs of southside elementary school students by:
 - o Building a new elementary school on Happy Valley’s property; and
 - o Renovating Lowell Elementary to include an elevator, new cafeteria and gymnasium.Together, the Happy Valley and Lowell projects will provide for the retirement of Larrabee Elementary School.
5. Renovate the transportation maintenance facility
6. Support all schools with preventive building system maintenance (heating, plumbing, roofs, walls, windows, doors, painting, etc.), energy efficiency and safety upgrades
7. A second tier of projects includes additional synthetic fields at Bellingham and Squalicum high schools, and improvements at Sunnyland, Carl Cozier and Columbia elementary schools.

Rebuild Sehome High School on its current 40-acre site along Bill McDonald Parkway with centralized kitchen, and synthetic turf fields here and at Bellingham and Squalicum high schools

Compared to all of our facilities, the 46-year old Sehome tied for having the worst physical condition score with Happy Valley Elementary School. Sehome’s structure and all major systems should be replaced.

Unlike our other high schools, there are no common gathering spaces for students and the sprawling layout and large number of entrances and exits create potential safety issues. Sehome’s current facility is not fully handicap accessible. Currently, students move from class to class in “California style” outdoor breezeways that are unsuitable for Northwest winters.

The building exterior does not comply with current energy codes; this deficiency adds to the cost of heating the classrooms. We believe the 40-plus acre lot provides room for construction of new buildings

without displacing students, similar to what was done recently when Shuksan Middle School was rebuilt. Portions of the existing campus deemed useable may be reused and incorporated into the new site plan.

We are excited by the idea that Sehome's classrooms and learning spaces will be thoughtfully designed to ensure accessibility, safety and an environment to successfully prepare students for the future.

Sehome's campus adds the possibility of including a centralized district kitchen. This type of kitchen would offer higher quality, healthier and more made-from-scratch meals to all schools in our district – instead of the existing reheat and serve model. A centralized kitchen could also potentially create a new hands-on vocational culinary arts opportunity for high school students.

Our Task Force heard from our community about the importance of addressing outdoor recreation needs both during and after the school day. The wet Pacific Northwest climate for much of the school year limits the use of existing school fields by both students and the community. The current fields often flood making them unusable for both physical education courses, athletics and community use. Due to strong community support for synthetic fields, this recommendation includes new multi-use synthetic fields at Sehome, Squalicum and Bellingham high schools. As part of the rebuild at Sehome, this recommendation includes football/soccer/baseball/softball fields at Sehome and football/soccer fields at Bellingham and Squalicum. We recommend adding baseball/softball turf fields at Bellingham and Squalicum as part of the second tier projects.

Cost estimate: \$73 million with centralized kitchen and synthetic fields at Sehome, plus \$5 million (for fields at Bellingham and Squalicum)

Build a fourth high school to serve Options High School and other students

For the past 20 years, Options High School has provided an alternative place for students choosing to stay in school but requiring more flexibility than is generally available in a traditional high school environment. While Options High School has been somewhat successful in serving students' needs with their current facility of seven portables, it has done so without science labs, common meeting areas, a gym or a lunchroom. This inadequate and temporary portable facility serves as a constant reminder of how much more we need to provide for some of our most vulnerable and at-risk secondary students.

The community strongly supports building a new facility not only to serve the current alternative educational needs of our students, but to also provide growth for future innovative programs that will serve students for years to come. Our Task Force agreed that a visioning process is needed for the educational programs that this facility will provide. However, because that was not part of our charge, no educational program components are included in this recommendation.

The site for the new Options/Innovations High School has not yet been designated and is potentially connected to the decision on the location for the Learning Support Center/District Office. If the fourth high school were to be built in the current District Office building on Dupont Street, one advantage would be an increase in square footage for student programs. A benefit of locating Options/Innovations

High School near Bellingham High is shared access to outdoor learning spaces, labs and perhaps other opportunities.

Cost estimate: \$17 million

Build a Learning Support Center/District Office

District leaders and support staff are currently housed in the Roeder Building on Dupont Street. The building is the oldest facility in the district, having been originally constructed in 1908. Structurally, the building needs major seismic work to make it safer in the event of an earthquake. One of the most significant seismic deficiencies is that the unreinforced brick walls are not connected to either the floors or the roof. All major systems including electrical, heating and ventilation, and plumbing are inadequate and need to be replaced. The facility is not energy efficient and flooding has occurred in the basement where the district technology center is located. In addition, much of the building is inaccessible for visitors with disabilities. The current facility was never designed to function as a central office, conference center or technology hub. Parking at the current facility is challenging. The conference rooms are small and insufficient for both staff development purposes and public meetings, making the building functionally inadequate.

It will cost \$17 million to renovate the Roeder Building whether it is redesigned for use as an administration building or redesigned as the new Options/Innovations High School. If the Roeder Building becomes Options/Innovations High School, the Learning Support Center/District Office will need to be moved. If a new District Office was built on Sehome High School's campus or another district-owned location, it would cost approximately \$10 million.

Task Force members felt it was important that the Learning Support Center/District Office be easily accessible to all members of the Bellingham Public Schools community including close proximity to the freeway and bus lines. The site for the Learning Support Center has not yet been designated and is potentially connected to the decision on the location for the new Options/Innovations High School.

Cost estimate: \$10 million

Partially renovate Parkview Elementary School to include a new gym and cafeteria, and address the needs of southside elementary school students by:

- **Building a new elementary school on Happy Valley's property; and**
 - **Renovating Lowell Elementary to include an elevator, new cafeteria and gymnasium.**
- Together, the Happy Valley and Lowell projects will provide for the retirement of Larrabee Elementary School.**

On the northside, Parkview Elementary School, built in 1957, has a number of functional issues. Parkview is the only school with a combined gym and cafeteria, creating scheduling conflicts as well as health issues. While the gym includes a stage, food service staff need the area to serve school meals and store the food service carts between meals — making the gym unavailable for its designed purpose. The main issues to address with renovation are a separate gym and cafeteria, adequate

bathrooms, meeting spaces, and outdoor traffic flow. While there are other improvements needed at Parkview, this recommendation would only address some of the most urgent physical condition and functional issues at Parkview within the next 10 years.

The Task Force also grappled with the reality that we have three southside elementary schools located within one mile of each other and all need significant capital improvements. Larrabee, Lowell and Happy Valley elementary schools face varying degrees of physical and functional issues related to 21st century educational needs. The three schools serve a population that highly values its small schools, have exceptional levels of family engagement, and a deep appreciation for their schools' historic presence in their neighborhoods. Meanwhile, best instructional practices, fiscal responsibility and enrollment do not support having three elementary schools operating in this area.

Tied with Sehome for being in the worst physical condition among all schools in the district, Happy Valley faces a number of problems. These include inadequate electrical, old plumbing and poor heating/ventilation. The school also has structural and energy efficiency issues with walls, ceilings, leaky roofs and floors. Because of the size of Happy Valley's property, it is possible to build a new school on its current site. The difficult fact that emerges is that Larrabee, because of its functional inadequacies and small site that significantly limits improvement options, is left out of the equation. Larrabee would be retired in its use as a school, allowing students to attend either the new neighborhood school on the Happy Valley site, or the nearby upgraded Lowell, depending on attendance areas.

Two elementary schools in this area, with two to three (2-3) classes per grade level would serve neighborhood students well. Happy Valley's property has the greatest potential for a rebuild because of its size. Lowell, with improvements, could provide two classes per grade level to enhance teacher collaboration and student programs. While Lowell is in better physical condition than the other two schools, it too faces some challenges related to being able to provide two classes per grade and it cannot effectively accommodate students or parents with disabilities. With the addition of a gym, cafeteria and elevator, Lowell could provide the necessary two classes per grade level to enhance teacher collaboration and student programs as well as becoming fully accessible to disabled students and parents.

Many Larrabee families shared concerns that the primary reason we proposed retiring Larrabee was to save money on operating the school. We focused first on Larrabee's functional inadequacy to meet student needs. At just about half the size of the next biggest school in the district, Larrabee cannot accommodate two classes per grade – which is increasingly important in addressing both academic and social/emotional development. Larrabee is unable to provide adequate program space for other important educational activities. For example, small group instruction, confidential meetings involving students, and teacher collaboration are a daily exercise in creativity and compromise. In addition, Larrabee cannot effectively accommodate students or parents with disabilities. Larrabee scored the lowest in the district for functional adequacy to meet student needs. The small property site limits what can be done, even if we used significant bond funds and local resources to upgrade Larrabee's functional level. That is, Larrabee's small site makes expansion difficult. In the face of new

construction requirements, attempting to expand Larrabee and improve its functional adequacy would only decrease the existing outdoor play areas.

Our Task Force does not make the recommendation to retire Larrabee lightly. The community input from throughout the school district around this issue was varied. The Task Force discussed and examined a large range of issues from walk-ability to the other schools, to the other advantages of Larrabee's current size. Ultimately, the Task Force concluded that in the long term, students would be best served in a new elementary school on Happy Valley's property and a renovated Lowell.

We recommend that Larrabee's retirement be coordinated with the opening of a new school at Happy Valley and the upgrades at Lowell to minimize disruption to families and student learning. A well-planned transition that allows many current Larrabee students to complete their schooling there while the new school at Happy Valley is being built and Lowell is being upgraded, should be considered to limit the number of moves that students need to make. Our Task Force also discussed the issues with prolonging the retirement of Larrabee. These include families with young children who want to enroll in the school their children will ultimately attend, and staff transfer requests. Because the retirement of Larrabee is handled through a separate process, it would not be included as part of a bond election. However, retiring Larrabee is part of this recommendation because it is tied to building the new school at Happy Valley and upgrading Lowell.

Cost estimate: \$29 million

Update the Transportation Facility

As our buses currently transport approximately 3,600 students every day, the Task Force, supported by external recommendations and survey feedback, feels that an upgrade is overdue for the Transportation Facility.

The building, built in the 1950s, is in poor physical condition and is energy inefficient. Although there are three shop bays, the majority of the work space has flooring issues, and only one lift exists in the garage. A second vehicle lift would more appropriately serve the district's needs, allowing a more efficient flow for regular maintenance and emergency repairs, resulting in better utilization of staff time. Safety issues include exhaust ventilation concerns, poorly insulated walls, roof issues, wood garage doors and inefficient heating systems.

An upgrade and modernization of the facility, for the health and safety of employees who work there, is recommended rather than a rebuild. It is located at a central point in the district, is on current district property and is very near the bus fueling station.

Cost estimate: \$4 million

Maintain and improve all schools, reduce energy use and upgrade safety

To protect our community's investment, major systems must be proactively maintained and replaced. As with any building, protecting our investment requires continual upkeep. The district has 1.3 million square feet of roofing to replace and maintain and 6 million square feet of coated surfaces protecting our

buildings. Some of the identified elementary school facility projects include, but are not limited to: new roofs at Roosevelt and Sunnyland; windows, doors, and wall replacement at Alderwood; exterior painting at Parkview, Roosevelt, Silver Beach; and flooring improvements at Carl Cozier, Silver Beach and Sunnyland. At the middle school level, both Fairhaven and Kulshan need exterior paint and Fairhaven requires some flooring replacement as well. At the high school level, Bellingham and Squalicum have need of exterior paint.

Reducing energy costs is fiscally responsible and provides an opportunity to direct funds from savings to other needs such as instructional programs and maintenance measures. One proven tool is upgrading Direct Digital Control (DDC) systems throughout the district. This system automatically controls a school's heating and cooling – it saved \$100,000 at Squalicum High School after the first year alone. A DDC system can be expanded to effectively control other energy intensive systems, such as interior and exterior lighting as our energy needs change.

After the community input process, the Task Force decided to include an additional \$2 million to this recommendation for safety upgrades. Safety and security improvements vary from school to school. One such upgrade could be a standardized key system and/or door security systems that allows for an effective and quick lockdown in the event of an emergency. Additionally, certain schools do not have lines of sight to appropriately monitor main entrances by office administrative staff or intercom systems necessary for effective schoolwide communication.

Implementing these facility upkeep and energy reduction projects will help provide more resources for instructional programs because the cost savings can be reinvested into other programs supporting the success of our students. Previous energy savings provided part of the funding for full-time kindergarten.

Cost estimate: \$8 million

A second tier of projects in our 10-year recommended plan includes additional synthetic fields at Bellingham and Squalicum high schools, and improvements at Sunnyland, Carl Cozier and Columbia elementary schools.

- Additional synthetic outdoor athletic fields at Bellingham and Squalicum High Schools to include baseball and softball fields
- Office renovation and other minor modernization at Sunnyland Elementary
- Office renovation and other building finishes at Carl Cozier Elementary
- The addition of an elevator and gym improvements at Columbia Elementary

Cost estimate: \$11.3 million

Closing

The Task Force recognizes that this is a significant amount of money to request from the voters, but a significant amount of work on our schools is badly needed. As a Task Force, we examined how our school tax rates compare to other school districts, both locally and to those with similar assessed property values. Currently, we're among the lowest and many of our facilities reflect this. We found

that even with this recommendation, we would rank in the middle of similar districts for school tax rates. However, the district would be well served to assess in more detail the impact of financing this recommendation in the context of overall current and forecasted property taxes levied by all taxing agencies. In doing so, the district may explore approaches to minimize the impact through refinancing, issue timing and debt service structure. As a Task Force our directive has been to *Stay in the Future: Place Matters*. We know that great schools build great communities. We can't ignore the critical state of these facilities and believe that it is fiscally responsible to ask our community to address the need at this time when interest rates and construction costs are low. Our community values sustainability and resourceful stewardship of our facilities; this has guided our process and is reflected in our recommendation.

Respectfully submitted by the Facilities Planning Task Force,

Jim and Linden Darling, Co-Chairs

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