

**Facilities Planning Task Force  
Meeting Minutes  
Jan. 11, 2013**

**Attending Members:** Leslie Adamson, Mike Anderson, Pam Behee, Alex Brede, Patrick Brown, Steve Clarke, Paul Clement, Ron Cowan, Missy Ferguson, Marilyn Grams, Tim Hall, Hale Hanaway, Jay Jordan, Rob McElroy, Teri McIntyre, Mark Peterson, Vicky Reardon, Evan Schmitt, Phyllis Textor, Tom Venable and Rachel Williams and Doug Nichols

**Ex-Officio:** Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

**Co-Chairs:** Jim and Linden Darling

**Union Representation:** Kris Craker, Peggy Shepherd, BASE; Bill Stuckrath, BAO; Matt Read, SEIU; David Vanderyacht, Teamsters

**Welcome:** Jim Darling welcomed the Task Force and explained the agenda for the day.

**Quick Recap:** Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe reminded the group of the progress so far and thanked the Task Force for engaging with the community during the input sessions in December. The Task Force held four community input session and there were more than 500 responses from the online survey. Tanya Rowe thanked Rachel Williams for her professional contributions and many volunteer hours in working with the survey data.

**Review Goals:** Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan also thanked the Task Force for their involvement during the community input sessions. Ron Cowan discussed a timeline for the Task Force in order to meet a potential April 23, 2013 election. He explained that the resolution would need to be to the County Auditor by March 8, 2013. Ron Cowan showed the Task Force an example of what a recommendation could look like based on the ideas from before winter break. He said the Task Force's first goal is to identify projects that need to be completed in the next 10 years. The second goal is to identify projects to recommend to the superintendent for a spring election.

Ron Cowan said for a spring election, the Task Force would need to make a recommendation to Superintendent Greg Baker by Jan. 30, 2013. In February, Dr. Baker would review the recommendations, share reflections and seek more input from stakeholders as needed. Ron Cowan explained that to pass a bond there needs to be a supermajority that votes yes for the bond. In addition, at least 40 percent of people who voted in the past general election must vote in the bond election as well.

A Task Force member asked if the bond was unsuccessful, when could we present a bond again? Ron Cowan answered that a bond can only be presented twice per calendar year to voters.

A Task Force member asked if it is expensive to put a measure on a bond? Ron Cowan answered that it does cost the district to have a bond on the ballot, but if the district wins the election, the bond money can help cover the cost. If the election is lost, that money must come from the school district's general fund.

**Small Group: Process Community Input:** The Task Force split into six small groups to discuss the community input and survey data after spending the past week reading and reviewing all of feedback received. Tanya Rowe asked Task Force members to discuss as many projects as

possible but each group should start with one project to ensure that the feedback for each area is thoroughly discussed and processed. She said the groups should look at the community input and report back about what the community is saying and how this may impact current project ideas.

### **Whole Group Report:**

*Group 1 (focused on Sehome):* Task Force members said that they noticed from the community input that there was good support for rebuilding Sehome. There were quite a few comments about keeping some of the existing buildings at Sehome. The Task Force members said they were surprised by the amount of support for new athletic fields at all of the high schools. There were some comments about building a wing for Options within a new Sehome High School. The Task Force members said the variety of feedback surprised them. They said there were some people who thought Sehome didn't need to be rebuilt and others who thought it was condemned.

*Group 2 (focused on Options):* Task Force members said feedback matched what they were thinking. General feedback was positive and supportive of a new facility. There is an importance of keeping the location for this school on a WTA bus line. Task Force members were all pleasantly surprised there wasn't pushback for what Options students need. Options students and staff have been considering whether another location besides the current one could work. They have been discussing that the current District Office site on Dupont Street could possibly work. It is on a bus line. Students are excited at the possibility of a gym in a new facility.

*Group 3 (focused on Learning Support Center/District Office):* Task Force members said there seemed to be a lot of pushback on the idea. Many in the community didn't feel like the idea was student-centered. More information needs to be shared about the between adult learning and student learning. There seems to be a general misunderstanding of the unsafe and poor condition of Roeder – people don't see what is wrong with the building. Task Force members discussed keeping the schools separate for the students and their ever-changing needs for programs. Task Force members discussed the current departments located at the District Office and whether or not a department could be removed and put in another school facility. This would reduce parking needs at the current or a new facility. Keeping the district office in a centralized location was a priority for the community.

*Group 4 (focused on Happy Valley/Parkview/Lowell/Larrabee):* Task Force members said the community lost sight of the poor condition of Happy Valley and that it needs to be rebuilt. Many in the community feel like the district is focusing on money as the driving issue behind retiring Larrabee. Task Force members said based on the community input, a lot of people focused on Lowell and thought it was already remodeled. People need information that the work previously completed at Lowell was an earthquake retrofit, not renovation. A sense of community at Larrabee was a huge focus. Task Force members felt like they have answers or responses to many of the questions about retiring Larrabee. Task Force members had a discussion about what is a mega-school and the need to educate people about the size of schools in Bellingham. Members discussed walk-ability for Happy Valley and working with the city to improve walk-ability and street traffic. One thing that surprised the Task Force members was that the community is surprised that Happy Valley needs a new building – people don't recognize that Happy Valley is in very poor physical condition.

*Group 5 (focused on Transportation Facility):* Based on community input, the transportation facility was the lowest of the six priorities. The community is not seeing the direct link between transportation for students and their education. Task Force members talked about not doing a full remodel of the bus facility, but they weren't sure that would make the small cost difference would make a difference for voters. Task Force members noted the strong community interest in synthetic fields that is something that they need to consider moving up in the priorities.

*Group 6 (focused on All Schools Improvements):* Task Force members said they were surprised that 85 percent of people from the phone survey listed all school improvements as the most important project. Task Force members said they believe this goes along with fiscal responsibility. Along with some of the things that surprised them, were the responses for a centralized cooking kitchen. Members said this project idea might be a good opportunity to improve safety at schools. Some schools can be locked down with a push of a button while others cannot. It might be a good idea to look at safety issues more closely within this project idea and increase the amount requested for this item. Members were surprised by the support for athletic fields.

**Whole Group Overview of Bond Financials:** Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan presented a PowerPoint. He said the general feedback received is that the community wants to know how much this is going to cost. It is unknown what assessed value and property taxes will be, especially far into the future. He said it easier to predict the next few years, however, not 20 years in the future.

Since the bond money needs to be used within 36 months of being awarded, he shared a draft of the impact of three bonds of \$44 million each. Based on these assumptions, the tax rate would increase by a total of 65 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value in 2014 with moderate increases in the few years that followed.

#### Comments:

- A Task Force member asked, when you say this increase would put us in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, what does that mean? Ron Cowan answered that being in the bottom 25<sup>th</sup> percentile means our school taxes in Bellingham are pretty low in comparison to districts with similar assessed value districts.
- Jim Darling wants the Task Force to keep in mind what the individual impact is for each household when requesting these projects and how much they will cost. This community has high overall high property costs compared to other communities.
- A Task Force member said the value of a good education system and quality educational facilities has more value to a family than paying a little more in their property taxes each year.
- A Task Force member asked what is the downside of not doing these projects now? Part of the reason we are doing this is because our buildings are old. We are taking the fiscally responsible approach to do this now while rates are low. It will save us money down the road. One of the things that brings people to a community is a good education system. The linchpin of our local economy is a good education system.

## **Whole Group Initial Check for Agreement on Top Priority Projects to Include in**

**Recommendation:** Tanya Rowe and Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Steve Clarke asked the group to vote on ideas that they feel are ready for the recommendation to the superintendent.

- The Task Force voted with no hesitations for a **Sehome High School** rebuild. The entire Task Force agreed that this should be added to the recommendation as the top priority for the next bond.

A Task Force member then proposed that All Schools Improvements/Energy Efficiency/Maintenance Upgrades be included as the second priority item, but the amount be increased from \$6 million to \$8 million. After an initial vote, Task Force members had some questions to process first and decided to table this item to the next meeting due to being out of time. How will the additional \$2 million be spent?

The Task Force then quickly went through the rest of the project ideas to gauge the overall sense of the group. Most ideas still had strong support, but all had questions or reservations to process first.

Regarding Options, a Task Force member suggested that the amount being requested is not enough to cover the cost of potential equipment needed for vocational programs.

Ron Cowan asked that Task Force members email him any questions by Sunday night that they feel to have answered in advance of the next meeting. This will allow us to bring data and answers to the next meeting.

Tanya Rowe and Steve Clarke explained the entire meeting on Jan. 16 would be dedicated to processing the rest of the project ideas and any new ideas.

Linden Darling reminded the Task Force that we have spent months discussing these ideas and reviewing data. What we are doing now is re-checking our thinking against all of the feedback that we have received – has it confirmed or changed our thinking? We are not starting over, but contemplating how what we heard and read changes our thinking.

**Schedule Going Forward:** Co-chair Jim Darling said two more meetings are needed before submitting a recommendation to the superintendent.

**Next meeting:** 3-5 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 16 in the District Office Board Room.

**Final meeting:** 8-10 a.m. Tuesday, January 29 in the District Office Board Room.

Task Force members completed the following written exercise during the Jan. 11 meeting:

### **Location Feedback**

Please complete this handout during the small group time and submit to Ron before the end of the end of the meeting.

After reading and processing the feedback, and spending months thinking about these issues, what is your best thinking at this time regarding the locations of Options and the District Office?

**Select one location with an X for the District Office and one location for Options to provide your input.**

	<b>District Office</b>	<b>Options</b>
Dupont Street (current Roeder site)	5	14
Sehome's campus	5	0
Behind BHS (current warehouse/Options site)	3	11
Commercial building downtown	7	0
Other: _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move District Office staff and warehouse to build on maintenance's property</li> <li>• Co-locate Options and District Office across from Squalicum</li> </ul>	