



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
FROM: Repurposing Larrabee Think Tank
DATE: April 10, 2014
RE: **Pros/Cons and Considerations of Larrabee Repurposing Applications**

Introduction

Following a process during the 2012-13 school year that resulted in a decision to retire Larrabee Elementary School at the end of June 2014, Bellingham Public Schools (the district) wanted to engage neighbors and community members in brainstorming ideas and giving feedback about how the school might be repurposed.

In October 2013, applications were solicited from parents and staff at Larrabee, neighbors who live near the school and community partners to begin work on this important task, with support from district staff. The group met six times from November – February.

The Repurposing Larrabee Think Tank is comprised of the following members:

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| Kathy Hasenjaeger | neighborhood/community member |
| Barbara Perry | neighborhood/community member |
| Courtney Sawyer | neighborhood/community member |
| Saralee Sky | neighborhood/community member |
| Jim Darling | neighborhood/community member |
| Pete Nelson | Larrabee Elementary School parent representative |
| Alex Brede | Larrabee Elementary School staff representative |
| Kate Baehr | Larrabee Elementary School principal |
| Rick Benner | community partner |
| Kristi Birkeland | community partner |
| Katie Franks | community partner |
| Mike Anderson | Buildings and Grounds Director |
| Rob McElroy | Co-Chair, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations |
| Ron Cowan | Co-Chair, Executive Administrator |
| Tanya Rowe/ Jackie Brawley | Communications and Community Relations |

Ex-officio:

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|-------------|-----------|
| Terry Brown | Architect |
| David King | Architect |

Background, Focus of Work and Setting Criteria:**GATHERING INFORMATION, BACKGROUND**

The Repurposing Larrabee Think Tank established early on that they did not want the facility to be left vacant, and that they agreed with the district's preference for it to be used as some type of education facility. The group toured Larrabee and reviewed the physical layout of the school's two buildings and zoning restrictions. It also discussed the process of accommodating new uses and the significance of the building.

SOLICITATION of PROPOSALS APPROACH

Because district uses would receive priority, the group decided that a "tiered" approach would be the best way of soliciting proposals – that is, to first request proposals from the district before opening the request for proposals to the public. The group did not want to alienate or frustrate non-district proponents by having them spend time, money and personal investment if a district use for the building could be identified. If it was found that the district could not effectively utilize Larrabee, the proposal process would be opened up to the public.

The group also learned about two local examples of repurposing historic buildings. The City's Fairhaven Fire Station Request for Proposals and Western Washington University's Request for Ideas for the National Guard Armory were both shared and provided two models that could be used to inspire a similar solicitation document. A summary of what was learned can be found in our [Dec. 12 meeting minutes](#).

DEVELOP CRITERIA for EVALUATION

To aid in the evaluation process, the group determined that criteria should be developed to help keep the process as objective as possible. Seven criteria were developed by the group as a whole, and then refined into a "rating range rubric" by smaller work groups. Proposals were reviewed according to these criteria:

- Financial impact on district
- Financial capacity of proposed user
- Proponent experience
- Alignment with district and community goals (Bellingham Promise)
- Compatibility with the neighborhood
- Land use compatibility
- Facility use compatibility – Historic Preservation

Please note: the criteria for evaluation was set for both Tier I and Tier II proposals (before the group decided to solicit district uses first), which is why not all of the criteria are addressed in group's review of the three proposals (or even applicable to Tier I proposals) .

REVIEW of PROPOSALS

The Think Tank reviewed three proposals from the district on February 27. The group's ratings and comments are provided below.

Proposal #1: District Office Space

Summary of Proposal: Temporarily moving 30% (27 people) of the staff who currently work at the District office to Larrabee. The timeline for this proposed temporary placement at Larrabee would be

from spring 2016 - August 2019 due to the possible relocation of Options High School to a portion of the district office before it is renovated.

| Criteria | Pros | Cons | Comments/questions |
|--|---|---|---|
| Financial impact on district | Cheaper than rent | Possible tenant improvements needed; only short-term use | (may bring some additional costs to district but below current operating and maintenance costs?) |
| Financial capacity of proposed user | | | n/a |
| Proponent experience | | | District has considerable relocation experience |
| Alignment with district and community goals (The Bellingham Promise) | | | Aligned with goals, but indirect educational use |
| Compatibility with the neighborhood | Neighborhood may get better/more access to playground | Parking issues; more traffic | Explore renting parking space for employees of the Lutheran church across from Larrabee |
| Land use compatibility | | | Some changes in land use, but not significant |
| Facility use compatibility – Historic Preservation | | Larrabee is not an office building Neighborhood may resent that the building is being used by adults only and not children | If this were the only proposal selected, would this building be left vacant? Vacant building is undesirable. Could there be a joint use with this proposal? |

Summary of Findings: The group expressed concerns with this proposal due to its short-term nature. Both the neighborhood and school district have expressed a desire to keep Larrabee open/in use in some capacity and to not be left vacant. Moving district office staff would happen two years after the school's retirement, and many questioned what would happen to the building for those two years. Some wondered if the district could use this as temporary office space along with another proposal (like Family Partnership).

Proposal #2: Family Partnership Program

Summary of Proposal: Bellingham Public Schools' [Family Partnership Program](#) will be a place for homeschooling families to find resources (e.g. curriculum materials), guidance and weekly classes. Uses will vary greatly from parent educational opportunities to physical education classes for homeschooled children. The partnership will need office space beginning in July 2014; it hopes to begin engaging families and students by the winter of 2014-15.

| Criteria | Pros | Cons | Comments/questions |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Financial impact on district | Program is financially compatible; it's a long-term use; it could bring in a possible increase in state funds; (may bring some additional costs to district but below current operating and maintenance costs) | Start-up costs (but this program will need start-up costs regardless if in Larrabee or not) | Why is Larrabee not ok as K-5 but would be ok for this type of program? (For answer, see summary of findings below and strong views in conclusion.) |

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| Financial capacity of proposed user | | | n/a |
| Proponent experience | | | District has considerable educational program experience, although not with a homeschool partnership |
| Alignment with district and community goals (Bellingham Promise) | High alignment with The Bellingham Promise; possible parent education opportunities | | |
| Compatibility with the neighborhood | Includes a program for children; playground and fields will still be available; hours of operation may be similar; less peak demand for traffic | Possible parking issues, more traffic | How many cars per day? Happy to have children and families in neighborhood. |
| Land use compatibility | | | No change in land use |
| Facility use compatibility – Historic Preservation | | | n/a (on-going costs?) |

Summary of Findings: The group liked this proposal because it's an educational use and aligned with The Bellingham Promise. They liked the fact that both parents and children would be coming to Larrabee to learn. The group advises the district to effectively communicate why this would be a good use for Larrabee (while the building didn't function as a traditional K-5). For example, this program would not have the same space requirements as a K-5 school and much more flexibility in how it would use classrooms and the building in general. The learning would not be focused solely on children; the Parent Partnership would also be a place for parents (homeschool teachers) to learn and collaborate. Space for auxiliary services for a nurse, counselor and/or psychologist would likely not be needed.

Proposal #3: Preschool Expansion

Summary of Proposal: The Preschool Expansion Project proposal would be for partial use of the facility. It proposes using 1 classroom for preschool students, the playground, bathrooms, kitchen and gym. The project would offer a space for 18 preschool students on weekdays – 18 in the morning and 18 in the afternoon.

| Criteria | Pros | Cons | Comments/questions |
|--|--|--|---|
| Financial impact on district | (some additional costs to district but below current O & M) | Required modifications to serve preschool students | Would this necessitate a need for facility improvements? If the district needs to accommodate preschool growth, is this the best solution for that? Cost effective? |
| Financial capacity of proposed user | | | n/a |
| Proponent experience | | | District has considerable preschool experience |
| Alignment with district and community goals (The Bellingham Promise) | Good alignment with early childhood goals | | |
| Compatibility with the neighborhood | May provide additional playground equipment for neighborhood use | Functional adequacy; playground equipment is for students 5 and older (would | May mean change in use of the building with minor impacts |

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| | | need new equipment); restroom availability | |
| Land use compatibility | | | No change in land use |
| Facility use compatibility – Historic Preservation | | | Is this an allowed use? Long-term sustainability? |

Summary of Findings: The group had concerns about this proposal related to the functionality of Larrabee as a preschool space. This led to more questions of safety and/or needed modifications (e.g. bathrooms, playground, front steps and other safety hazards that have been identified). If modifications were made, the group felt housing preschool was doable, but they wondered if eventually, the school district would prefer to have neighborhood preschool programs within existing elementary schools.

Final thoughts and suggestions on what to consider moving forward:

Strong Views: Throughout the process, the Think Tank has maintained its belief that Larrabee not be left empty. The group consensus was that the Family Partnership Program seemed to be the best fit for Larrabee. They felt it would be the best use of the building (of the three proposals) because it’s more flexible and adaptable than a traditional K-5 school. The Larrabee facility would also continue to provide an educational purpose, serving children and their families.

Thoughts and questions to consider:

Several members voiced concerns with both the preschool proposal and the temporary placement of district staff at Larrabee. From a public relations stand-point, many warned against using a recently closed K-5 school for administrative space. The group also questioned that if a building is functionally inadequate for K-5, is it also inadequate for preschool? Others wondered if the preschool proposal could be temporarily housed at Larrabee while the homeschool program is starting out and growing. While many members expressed excitement about the preschool program, they wondered if it was good long-term thinking to put a preschool into a separate facility (as opposed to fully functioning elementary schools). The group had mixed feelings on the site’s portables; some saw them as an eyesore and others said they were valuable as additional space that were more accessible than the top floors of the facility.

Reflections on process:

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the repurposing process. We would be happy to answer any questions or meet with you, if necessary. We believe the process and criteria designed and developed by this think tank would continue to be viable should there be a need to consider Tier II proposals in the future.