

Facilities Planning Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Nov. 14, 2012

Attending Members: Leslie Adamson, Mike Anderson, Pam Behee, Alex Brede, Steve Clarke, Paul Clement, Ron Cowan, Missy Ferguson, Marilyn Grams, Hale Hanaway, Laura Johanson, Jay Jordan, Mary LeDonne, Rob McElroy, Teri McIntyre, Mark Peterson, Rick Qualls, Vicky Reardon, Phyllis Textor, Rachel Williams

Co-Chairs: Jim and Linden Darling

Ex-Officio: Superintendent Greg Baker and Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

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

Welcome: Co-Chair Jim Darling welcomed the task force and explained handouts compiled from the previous meeting. He suggested that the task force focus on preparing ideas to take to the community for input. Additional meetings are needed for further discussion and to allow time for a good process of community input.

Meeting 7 Follow Up: Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan explained handouts and updates from the previous meeting. For the projects the task force is considering, project costs and tax rates are important consideration factors.

- Bond program draft with updates and edits
- Revised bond issue charts
 - A member asked if the task force should consider splitting up the bond since the money must be used within 36 months.
 - A member was confused by scenarios three and six; in scenario three the interest is so much less.
 - Ron explained for scenario three the tax rates remain level.
 - A member asked what will taxpayers see when a bond is presented?
 - Tanya Rowe explained the tax rate will be clear to voters and it is important that the district be straightforward with the information.
 - A member asked if he can rely on the estimates the task force has been given?
 - Ron said the charts are estimates based upon what underwriters, who are attuned to market conditions, provide.
- Composite Whatcom County Tax Rate
 - Ron presented the tax rate sheet with additional tax information in comparison to other Whatcom County school districts.
- Tax Rate Debrief/Q&A

What's Our Story/Discuss/Edits?

- A member questioned why Parkview Elementary School is separate.
- Jim suggested that all elementary schools be clumped together for specific needed upgrades.
- A member suggested Parkview should be considered as separate, based upon building condition needs, as a north side project.
- A member said the community needs to know Sehome does not meet the needs of students.
- A member said there is a difference between the availability of facilities and the facilities that are up to standard. He worries this would create inequity throughout the district.

Fiscal Responsibility: Jim Darling explained that fiscal responsibility was one of the task force's guiding principles. He asked the group to consider what fiscal responsibility means to them. Jim said his preference would be to see a level tax rate for voters.

- A member asked if the task force should consider scenario one because the money needs to be used within 36 months.
- Ron said it is possible to accomplish all projects within 36 months. It just means hiring more people to manage multiple projects. He said until the task force solidifies the plan, he won't have a more clear tax rate for voters. Right now, he said the task force needs to solidify what ideas to put before the community for initial feedback.
- The task force needs to be mindful of timing as it impacts construction and financing costs.
- A task member said when they look at the long view of taxes toward 2036, he doesn't see tax rates going down. He said the task force should push for higher rates early on so they are lower in the future.
- A task member said it might be best to avoid risk and stay with a level tax rate. Certainty is important for voters.
- Ron asked the task force, "What are the big ticket items in the district?" High schools are the most expensive; will the district rebuild another high school in the next ten years? He said probably not, so the district won't have to ask the voters for another substantial bond in the near future.
- A member said they thought it was fiscally responsible to build high quality buildings that are going to last, so the community knows these buildings will be around for 40 or 50 years.
- A member said we need high quality buildings because we have a high standard for our students' education. We need to maintain those high standards of education.
- A member said we should take advantage of low interest rates.
- The district can help stimulate the local economy.
- A member said the district should maximize the use of the facilities to share with the community.

Solidifying Our Initial Thinking: Jim explained the task force needs to prepare a list of ideas and projects to share with the community for input. He asked the task force to use their "Initial Thinking" handout from the previous meeting.

- Jim said the task force has two choices, give the community the initial thoughts for the entire 10 years and see what they think or present the community with more specific facility plans with only projects under consideration for the next five years.
 - A member said he thinks the community should have the whole list, but he worries that people would be overwhelmed.
 - A member said that if we break down all the miscellaneous projects this shows that the district is trying to improve all those schools.
 - A member said to send the message that we understand we may be asking for a lot but we are trying to be fiscally responsible and explain exactly why we are asking for these projects.
 - A member said that the input and survey questions we ask the community are very important.
 - A member said we need to tell the community everything we have done so far including site visits, data review, and presentations.
 - A task force member said he feels comfortable with the top tier projects but he is concerned about the additional projects and the cost of those.
- Jim asked the task force to specifically look at Innovations/Options High School and the breakdown of costs.

- A member said many community members may not know Options exist. He said the community needs to know more about the school before we present them with an idea.
- Jim said with Options High School there are multiple options including moving it to the current district office site in a rebuilt facility which could accommodate 350 students:
 - Jim suggested repurposing the Roeder historical building for students and relocating the district office.
 - Jim asked if the task force wanted to move Options to a brand new building but close to another high school.
- The school could be rebuilt from ground up that would be close to 23,000 square feet. That size would cap the enrollment at 175 students. However, if it is near another high school, it wouldn't need all the same facilities, for example, a gym and labs.
- A member said that moving Options away and making it separate helps the school create an identity.
- A member said capping enrollment at 175 prevents the school from expanding in the future.
- Jim asked if the district office should be renovated or a smaller facility be built on an existing owned property?
 - A member said it would be challenging to leave the district office vacant. He said he thinks if funds are being spent either way on the Roeder building, it would be best spent for students.
 - Jim said funding needs to be set aside for a Learning Support Center to house Central Services staff and provide nearby space for teachers and staff.
 - A member said if Options is moved to the current district office, it will become much larger and more comprehensive than it is now.
 - A member said he doesn't think they can ask for funding for Options and funding to remodel the district office for administrative offices. It may need to be one or the other.
 - A member said we need to narrow down costs and ideas for each project instead of "what could be?" and no direction.
 - A member said she thinks Options would be better near a high school to share the facilities such as an athletic field.
 - Jim said how about we present the ideas to the community such as, we want to spend funds on Innovations High School and we think it could be one of three places (BHS, SHS or current District Office location).
 - A member said that he wasn't sure about a fourth high school project that serves only 100 students. He worries that won't relate to voters. He said the elementary package will really relate to a lot of community members.
- Jim suggested Sehome and Options high schools are in and then present a few options for those projects. Learning Support Center (district office) be a smaller, newer building.
- The name Miscellaneous Projects should be changed to accurately express what it is.
- Should be an elementary package that includes Parkview/Sunnyland/Carl Cozier/Columbia.
- Should athletic fields be combined?
 - A member said that he doesn't see the community supporting a plan that costs this much.
 - A member said to make the fields multi-purpose like one turf field that serves both football and soccer.
 - A member asked if the fields would be a revenue source.
 - Ron said the fees charged to use facilities are so low already because the district feels that the community has already paid for those facilities so he doesn't see it being a large revenue source.

Communications Plan: Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe spoke to the task force about their communications plan.

- Options High School has a unique situation where they invite all families to their site on Nov. 8 and 9. Tanya and Leslie Adamson created an input form for Options families and staff.
- She said the Inside Schools Newsletter is being sent to 55,000 homes in the community and includes an update on the Facilities Planning Task Force.
- Tanya was thinking the task force needs some type of document that could be given out at schools or meetings that tells the story of their work and ideas. Creating a draft to review at the next meeting will help clarify some issues.
- Video can be a very powerful communications tool and she suggested making a brief video to share ideas and solicit/spark input. She asked the members to email her if they would like to work on the video. The video could end with options for community feedback.
- Tanya said she is already getting community feedback and suggested that the task force do their own survey soon. She said some people are concerned a decision has already been made. It's clear this is not true to you who have been doing this work, so communicating the input process soon is very important.
- She explained that giving the community multiple opportunities/ways to give feedback is a critical part of the process.
- She said the task force would meet again on Jan. 11, 2013, to review input from the community.
 - A member asked if the video could be used to introduce input sessions so the message would be the same throughout.
 - A member said he would like the input sessions structured so that the task force is getting input about all district issues, not just one hot topic.
- Tanya asked the members to think about the format for the input sessions and which members would like to lead them?
 - A member asked why so many proposed input sessions are on the south side of town. She asked if there could be a session at Parkview or an equal number of sessions on the north/central sides of town.
 - If every group is going to touch on every question it doesn't matter where the location is.
 - Members suggested the same presentation, input opportunities at multiple meetings on different dates in different locations.
 - The tentative window for input is Nov. 30 – Dec. 14. Tanya will work with task force members to finalize dates between now and the next meeting.
 - At the Nov. 28 meeting, the task force will review the draft document, video, survey and make any changes to the ideas they want to take out into the community for input.

Next meeting: Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2012, 8:00 a.m. - District Office Board Room