

Facilities Planning Task Force
Nov. 2, 2012
Meeting Minutes

Attending Members: Leslie Adamson, Mike Anderson, Pam Behee, Alex Brede, Patrick Brown, Steve Clarke, Paul Clement, Ron Cowan, Melissa Ferguson, Marilyn Grams, Hale Hanaway, Laura Johanson, Jay Jordan, Mary LeDonne, Rob McElroy, Teri McIntyre, Lisa McKay, James Pai, Mark Peterson, Rick Qualls, Vicky Reardon, Zoe Roberts, Evan Schmitt, Tom Venable, Rachel Williams, Doug Nichols

Co-Chairs: Jim and Linden Darling

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

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

Welcome: Co-chair Jim Darling welcomed the task force members.

Small Group Think Tank Exercise

Jim Darling explained that the task force members would be split into six groups based on the task force focus projects listed below. Members who requested a specific group have been assigned to that group and will make suggestions based on whether they think their focus project should be modernized or have capital improvements. All task force members received a copy of facility improvements for each school as suggested by the principals. Please click here to view.

- Sehome High School
- Options High School
- Larrabee/Lowell/Happy Valley elementary schools
- Other focus elementary schools
- Transportation/athletic fields
- District Office/property/misc. projects

Options High School

The task force members said Options High School needs to be remodeled and should be considered in the first round of funding. The current facility is just a collection of portables. Keeping to their commitment of The Bellingham Promise, the task force members said that all students should have the same resources of a quality facility. It would be best to have Options High School near another high school so facilities could be shared. Options should be on a bus line with the fewest stops as possible. A smaller, specialized school would be a good revenue opportunity if it could be rented out. Something needs to happen soon because the space is really inadequate. If the current space was repurposed the portables could be redistributed to schools or used for staff development. The new small high school could be placed next to Sehome since Sehome is on the bus line and near Western Washington University or remain near Bellingham High School since it is a great central location.

Sehome High School

Task force members said that Sehome needs to be completely replaced and in the first round of available funding. The school should be new instead of modernized. The Industrial Arts building could be modernized. The physical condition score and the functional adequacy scores for Sehome was the lowest. The current layout of Sehome is not conducive for students. Since it is so spread out, it is difficult for students to get to class on time. Sehome does not lend itself well to creating community since there are no common spaces. This building does not serve the needs of the students who attend. There are safety issues because there are so many ways to enter the various buildings. Heating the classrooms, especially in the courtyard area, is difficult. The counseling area has no natural lighting. Because there are more than 40 usable acres, Sehome could easily accommodate another building on the property, whether it be a District Office, an Early Childhood Center, or fourth small high school. The members said they want Sehome to stay a high school, but are happy to share the space. They suggested building the new Sehome on the senior parking lot so that students could stay put while the new building is being built. The juniors' parking lot could be an additional building and the middle area could be shared parking and field space.

Lowell/Larrabee/Happy Valley

Task force members discussed the 700 kids served by the three schools and the best way to serve them. They discussed closing schools or repurposing them. Of those three schools, they felt Happy Valley was the only school worthy of rebuilding based on the size of the site and the condition. Improvements for Lowell, such as adding a gym, would be a great capital investment. Members said Lowell should be made into a two-section school so the population of students could move from Larrabee to Happy Valley and Lowell. Larrabee, Lowell and Happy Valley all serve as community centers and the mention of any school being closed is worrisome for some people. It was suggested that Larrabee could be a community center of some type, jointly used by Bellingham Public Schools, City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation, and YMCA. Larrabee is the only park-like space that doesn't involve crossing a major arterial.

Additional Elementary Focus Schools

Task force members said there are some facility needs at additional elementary schools but they don't know how they fit with everything else. They thought that none of the other focus elementary schools discussed need to be completely modernized or replaced. They suggested Parkview for the first or second round of funding for facility improvements. They suggested Sunnyland and Columbia for the second round of funding. At Parkview the biggest issue is the gym/cafeteria area. Members said Parkview really needs a multi-use facility gym. Since Parkview is right next to Cornwall Park, maybe there is a joint deal that can be made with the City of Bellingham to allow additional parking. Members felt like they didn't have enough information about Columbia. They said they are aware of need for the gym wall and office space. Members said that Sunnyland could be considered for the second round of funding and that it needs a larger cafeteria and an office remodel. Members said all of these buildings could accommodate more community use if they received some updates.

Transportation

Task force members thought the transportation shop should be in first round of funding as this project keeps getting pushed back. The garage and shop need to be replaced. It affects the health and wellness of staff there. They said it would be possible to add staff development space for districtwide use since the shop is centrally located. The current location is ideal because it is close to I-5. The members said there is no way to change how the building is used right now. If the shop was relocated, the members suggested using the old Department of Transportation spot

on Sunset Drive. Members said the current location of the shop is where it should remain, but a total rebuild is needed.

Athletic fields

Task force members asked if there was a rebuild of Sehome, could a new field be built there. If there is a new, fourth small high school, would that also include an athletic field? The members said in the next round of available funding, they would like to see improvement to fields at Squalicum High School. Because it is located at the north end of the district, it is a part of the community and is used for a lot of different purposes. Members said they are not only looking at the educational needs of students, but also the physical need for outdoor learning spaces. Having a field in the north end of the city would reduce the need to transport students to Civic Field. Members said these updates could be in the second round of funding.

District Office

After touring the District Office, task force members said they don't like that the facility does not provide for the staff that work and attend meetings there and for families who come for services. They think the District Office deserves funding in the first round and needs a complete replacement. They said the facility it is a major safety concern, especially due to age and that it is the only facility in the district that hasn't had seismic upgrades for earthquake safety. The functional adequacy score is low and accessibility is non-existent. Members said this does not serve parents, students, and staff well. They said the District Office needs to be completely rebuilt and possibly relocated. If the building was to be replaced at its site, staff would need to relocate during construction. Members discussed putting the District Office adjacent to Sehome or Bellingham high schools. Members thought Squalicum would not be a good location since a bus line does not serve that area and families come to District Office who might not have transportation. Members thought it was best for the building to be centrally located and also suggested Larrabee or Columbia as possible locations. Members said if the Dupont Street property were sold perhaps it could be used for apartments or condos and that it might be attractive for developers. Renovating did not seem like a good idea for the members because the improvements needed are so significant: seismic, all major systems, functional work space, additional meeting spaces, accessibility, etc. Other ideas included making the current District Office building a new community center or a parent partnership program for homeschooled students.

Misc. projects

The district is currently doing retroactive maintenance and replaces items as needed. Members said if Buildings and Grounds were given the funding to complete projects that are necessary, it would cost about \$6 million in the next bond. Members said if Buildings and Grounds had \$8 million, they would be able to do proactive maintenance and set aside funds for facility improvements. Task force members felt it was a better use of funds to complete all necessary maintenance items at the schools, if possible.

Small Group Initial Priority Session and Display

Jim Darling asked the task force members to consider everything they have heard from all the meetings and use that information to suggest priority projects.

Initial Priority Projects, in order:

- Sehome High School
- Fourth small high school (Options)
- District Office
- Happy Valley and Larrabee elementary schools

- Transportation
- Misc. projects
- Parkview
- Other priority projects:
 - Sunnyland (cafeteria, office, storage)
 - Athletic Fields
 - Carl Cozier (entry)
 - Columbia
 - Lowell (gym)

Comments regarding priority projects:

- Larrabee and Happy Valley should be the same project.
- Regarding safety, the District Office is really high on the list.
- A decision needs to be made regarding what is being added to Sehome's site. Whether the District Office and/or Options goes to Sehome's site, it will cost additional money.
- Parkview needs a gym/cafeteria space.
- School improvements should come before athletic fields.
- The projects task force members discussed would be items they hope to have on the next bond effort.

Jim Darling asked the members what else they want or need to know to refine the initial list of their priority projects.

- A member asked how comprehensive the miscellaneous projects list is.

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe presented the task force with some options for engaging students, staff, families, and the community in this work. She talked about the importance of listening and gathering feedback from stakeholders. Tanya suggested the task force could gather input through a variety of ways, including online surveys or meetings. She discussed Nov. 14 as a meeting date to refine a communications plan and key messages. The task force agreed to meet for further discussion about community engagement on Nov. 9 and Nov. 14. Between Nov. 15 and Nov. 27, the task force will gather input and feedback on the task force's proposal before preparing a recommendation to the superintendent. On Nov. 28, the task force will review input and make modifications as necessary. In early December, the superintendent will reflect on the recommendation from the task force and seek additional input as needed.

The task force members said it would be really important for the public to know more about what is needed for students and our schools. The members agreed to come together for an additional meeting next Friday.

For the next meeting Ron Cowan will bring back tax estimates for projects and what might a bond cost if the task force wishes to complete all priority projects.

Remaining meetings:

Friday, Nov. 9	8 a.m. District Office Board Room
Wednesday, Nov. 14	8 a.m. District Office Board Room
Wednesday, Nov. 28	8 a.m. District Office Board Room