

**Facilities Planning Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Nov. 28, 2012**

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, Laura Johanson, Jay Jordan, Rob McElroy, Teri McIntyre, Lisa McKay, James Pai, Mark Peterson, Rick Qualls, Vicky Reardon, Zoe Roberts, Evan Schmitt, Phyllis Textor, Tom Venable and 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, Peggy Shepherd, BASE; Bill Stuckrath, BAO; Matt Read, SEIU; David Vanderyacht, Teamsters

Welcome: Co-Chair Jim Darling welcomed the group and asked members if they had items to discuss from last week. He explained that the Task Force needs make a recommendation to the superintendent toward the end January after receiving and processing community input.

Verifying Task Force's Ideas for Input: Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Steve Clarke and Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe presented an exercise to help clarify the projects the Task Force is presenting to the community for input. Each Task Force member was given a red, green and yellow card and a draft of their ideas discussed during earlier meetings. They were asked to consider if these are the seven top projects that they want to take out for input? Green means the idea is ready; yellow means there are reservations; and red means I am opposed to this idea. After discussion by the group, the ideas will be reviewed again later during this meeting and another show of green/yellow/red cards will be taken to ensure all questions/reservations have been processed and that Task Force members have had any opportunity to make changes.

Sehome High School: The group overwhelming said yes they would like to go forward with this project.

- One member had a reservation about adding synthetic fields at Sehome and asked if they needed to be done.
 - Buildings and Grounds Director Mike Anderson answered that the current fields get so flooded sometimes that they become unusable.
 - Doug Nichols from Educational Service District (ESD) 112 said the estimated cost for Sehome included a synthetic track and field and lighting for the field.
- A member wondered if they should include information about adding another building to Sehome.
- A member asked if people assume fields are updated when a school is remodeled.
- A member mentioned that people may support a project that includes a field renovation because, though they may not have students in school, they may use the field as a community member.
- A member asked if we should consider what the community is using and share those ideas.

- A member said she felt like the group should emphasize the need for a new school and share the additional things that come with the new school later.
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The group then agreed to move forward on the project, including the synthetic turf field, but decided not to highlight/mention this in the communications regarding the Sehome project idea at this time to see if it would come up during the input process.

Options High School: The majority of Task Force members agreed with this project. There were a few questions.

- A member said this idea is based around programs and not centered on facilities. People are going to ask, how are you going to use this? Why is this building going to be twice as large? They need a philosophical reason as to why we need this space.
- Deputy Superintendent Tom Venable said that he thinks about the number of students the district transports out of the district to access vocational services. They don't have a facility in the heart of Bellingham that promotes those programs. Our mission is to provide students options and we don't have the facilities to accomplish this. The district is redefining how we serve all students. Right now people perceive Options as a place where students go who are credit deficient, whereas, we want this to be an option for every student based on the courses that are being offered. We want to create future ready students.

Tanya summarized the discussion and asked if they agreed with the newly revised project description. She asked the group to vote again and received all green cards. Members wanted to:

- Emphasize that students are in portables in an inadequate facility.
- Broaden future possibilities for this school to make it more of an innovative secondary academy.
- Focus more on facility needs for students now and think about innovative possibilities for future students.

Learning Support Center (District Office): The members initially voted with a mix of green and yellow cards, indicating many questions and reservations that needed to be processed. The Task Force had a lengthy discussion regarding cost, space needs, location (including keeping it at the current site on Dupont Street; building on the space where Options is now; building on Sehome's campus; renting an existing commercial space such as a downtown building).

After processing ideas and questions, Task Force members voted again and agreed to move forward with the idea. Members wanted to:

- Emphasize both buildings are inadequate (Options and the District Office).
- Consider that there are multiple options for the District Office location including, rebuilding on current property, purchasing new property, or co-locating (see details above).

Larrabee/Happy Valley/Lowell: The group voted and the majority agreed with the idea. There were some questions that needed to be processed.

Members discussed focusing on what is best for kids. A member acknowledged that there are many questions that haven't been answered yet for the Larrabee community such as

transportation costs; people love their school the way it is; they don't want to change it and fear "a mega school."

Discussion about school size: Members discussed that the average elementary school enrollment is 360 in Bellingham. The average elementary enrollment for Washington is 450. Even Bellingham's larger elementary schools are still smaller on average. A member said there are a lot more program options for kids and teacher collaboration at schools with two or three classrooms per grade level and those opportunities aren't there at schools with one classroom per grade level. A member said the main idea is rebuilding Happy Valley; the short-comings for teaching at Larrabee that is so small needs to be explained. A member said there is not an understanding of what it takes to make Larrabee run and function well for today's learning needs. There is a narrow constraint of circumstances to make the school function. The Task Force should focus on what could be done at a new school and the improvements.

Discussion about keeping/rebuilding Larrabee: A member said the perception exists that the Task Force hasn't looked at all the options. A member said we need to emphasize that we are thinking about building at Happy Valley because the site is larger. We are not proposing sending kids to Happy Valley, but want to work together to build a school for everyone. Some students would go to Lowell, which is under enrollment currently. A member said there isn't really any space to expand or remodel Larrabee because there would be no field space for students to play. Another member said this Task Force had previously discussed it was not fiscally responsible to rebuild both Larrabee and Happy Valley. He asked if we still want to present this idea to the community? Another member said this has been considered; we don't have the population on the southside to support three, two to three-section schools. In response to a Task Force member's question, Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan said we are rebuilding a two-section school at Birchwood and it is 40,000 square feet. The estimated cost is \$12 million. Larrabee is currently 18,000 square feet. Another member agreed and said these three facilities (Lowell, Larrabee, Happy Valley) are all low-scoring. She said it is not fiscally responsible to rebuild on all of those sites. We need to rebuild on Larrabee or Happy Valley, and there is more space at Happy Valley. Consultant Doug Nichols said Larrabee is on 1.3 acres. The city would probably ask for parking and stormwater renovations. There would be no outdoor space for children. A new school at Happy Valley would accommodate the populations and it is a long-term plan. A member said that a 21st century school that serves all students fits the bigger picture of The Bellingham Promise.

Discussion about neighborhood schools and a sense of community: A member said that we are here to give our individual input but also add what we think is best for our community. We cannot build 200-students-or-less schools all over our community. It is not fiscally responsible. We do want schools with collaborative teaching experiences. This is a community issue. It is not just about one school; it is about the thousands of students that come to this district. Full-time kindergarten was expanded to all schools to help the entire district; we did not just give it to one school. A member said she would challenge Larrabee parents to go to other schools in the district and still claim they have more community. A great environment is created by the staff not the size of the building. A member said her students went to Carl Cozier when it was a larger school and that the principal there knew every student. Her students were known by the staff. She understands that parents are worried about losing personalization but they won't lose that.

Possible uses for Larrabee if retired: A member supported the idea to partner with the city or a community agency to make it a community center. It is not something the district could do alone or pay for.

Providing rationale about the idea to retire Larrabee based on these discussions: Members felt it would be important to share information about the rationale behind this idea, but also felt it was important to listen and gather input to better understand what people think and how they feel to see if this confirms or changes how Task Force members currently feel.

The Task Force then took another poll of red/yellow/green cards following these extensive conversations. All members were green, in agreement to move the idea forward for community input of a new school at Happy Valley and retiring Larrabee.

Transportation Shop: The group voted and mostly agreed; however, there were some reservations.

A member asked why they are considering rebuilding on that site when it is a salmon restoration site? Another member said it would remain a salmon restoration site. A member said there needs to be information about how old the building is and the work environment. A member said there needs to be more information, it is not functional; staff are only able to work on one bus at a time. A member suggested changing the title to Student Transportation Center. We need to emphasize that this increases transportation safety for students too. A member thought we might transport more students in a week than WTA does in a month and this district's facility is in very bad condition in comparison.

The group re-voted and agreed to move forward with the idea.

All Schools Improvement Projects: The group voted and had some questions.

A member said there are projects that can be done at schools to reduce energy usage and save on energy costs. It has been proposed to do the same thing at other schools and it will save money for the district. A member said we have some real examples of what energy efficiency can do for us. This helps partially pay for full-time kindergarten. A member asked if some examples can be given of which schools will have work done? A member said this idea needs to explain how this protects community investments.

A member asked if we should explain that this is a shift to proactively maintain facilities? In the past, it has been retroactive repairs whereas this would be a replacement of building systems.

The group re-voted and said yes to go forward.

Improve Parkview Elementary School: The group voted and there were a few questions.

A member said he thought this should include more than just Parkview. A member said that Parkview is the only school with a combined compromised space (gym and cafeteria). When it is raining, students cannot play in the gym because other students are there eating. A member said the community does not understand how difficult it is to share that space. Another member said she doesn't see why Parkview is being singled out with a greater need than the other schools? A member said she didn't feel like some projects at the other schools were as needed as the gym at Parkview. A member said that Lowell would need a new cafeteria as well if it was to serve more students. A member asked if both of these ideas – Parkview and Lowell – should all be presented to the community now? A member asked if the second phase projects should be the same importance of other projects and make it number 8?

A member suggested removing the priority numbers from the ideas when presented to the community. He said he thought the ranking was based on the most obvious need. Another

member disagreed that we do put an order for a reason. If she could only present one project, she would present Sehome.

A member said the improvement at Parkview is similar to the improvements that we are looking for at the other elementary schools like Carl Cozier/Lowell/Sunnyland.

A member suggested including the remodels of Parkview and Lowell with the new school at Happy Valley and the retirement of Larrabee as part of a package. The group voted and agreed.

They decided to include the other needs for “future consideration” during the input phase to see what people think.

Sign-Ups for Input Sessions: The Task Force was asked to sign up for community input sessions. Task Force members will be meeting with the City of Bellingham and the Bellingham Herald soon to share updates.

Next Meeting: Friday, January 11 at 8 a.m.