



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

FROM: Attendance Area Committee for Happy Valley and Lowell

DATE: February 3, 2014

RE: **Recommendation for Attendance Areas**

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, new attendance areas need to be established for where Larrabee students will attend school starting in fall 2014.

In September 2013, applications were solicited from parents and staff at Larrabee, Happy Valley and Lowell Elementary to begin work on this important task, with support from district staff.

The Attendance Area Committee for Happy Valley and Lowell is comprised of the following members:

Rob McElroy	Co-Chair
Ron Cowan	Co-Chair
Karen Tolliver	Principal, Happy Valley Elementary
Kate Baehr	Principal, Larrabee Elementary
Missy Ferguson	Principal, Lowell Elementary
Andrew Robinson	Happy Valley Parent
Rachel Williams	Happy Valley Parent
Heidi Ling	Larrabee Parent
Maia Thomas	Larrabee Parent
Shelley Higgins	Lowell Parent
Kate Wearn	Lowell Parent
Katherine Tully	Music Specialist, Happy Valley/Larrabee
Kerri Clary	Paraeducator, Larrabee
Jeff Hilburn	Fifth Grade Teacher, Lowell
Kim Brown	Transportation Options Coordinator, City of Bellingham
Tanya Rowe	Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations, Bellingham Public Schools
Rae Anne Thon	Director, Pupil Transportation, Bellingham Public Schools
Steve Walker	Middle Fork GIS

Our committee met five times between October and December, resulting in an initial proposal to present to the community for input.

In developing our proposal, the committee:

- Toured Happy Valley and Lowell to gain better understanding of facilities, programs, and capacities of each school.
- Collected and considered enrollment and demographic data including current and historical enrollment numbers, numbers of transfer students, and percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunch at each school.
- Considered traffic patterns, walking routes, distances, and walkability, as well as other transportation considerations and costs.
- Used GIS technology to compile, map, and analyze data and various possible scenarios and to help develop projections of how various scenarios would affect student counts, free/reduced data, etc.
- Assessed a variety of possible scenarios in light of the committee's charge, the consideration factors and additional factors described above.
- Agreed that the preschool program at Happy Valley and the Bridges program at Lowell should not be displaced as these programs are integral to the cultures of their respective schools.

Following this initial work, the committee put forward an initial proposal for public feedback utilizing online and print surveys, as well as a public input meeting on Jan. 9, 2014 at Larrabee Elementary School.

The committee then met two additional times in January 2014 to consider the input received and how that input fit with the consideration factors:

- Minimizing disruption of student's established learning programs.
- Whenever possible, keep siblings in the same elementary school.
- Provide overall balance of student numbers that relates to facility size and taking into account future growth patterns.
- Provide a reasonably balanced socio-economic relationship in all schools.
- Provide the most efficient and feasible means for student transportation to and from schools, including walking routes, minimizing travel time and transportation costs.
- Whenever possible, keep neighborhoods together.
- Where possible, maintain feeder school networks so elementary/middle/high school boundaries coincide.
- Where possible, follow natural boundaries and utilize existing physical boundaries such as major roadways.

Each factor was recognized for its merit. There were approximately 60 respondents to the surveys and approximately 15 parents/community members attended the input session. The input came from all three schools, including families, staff, and members of the broader community. Our committee took considerable time to process and review all of the feedback and survey results over two meetings in mid-January and in between. As a result of the careful conversation and deliberations, the committee agreed to submit this recommendation.

Our Recommendation

As a committee, we revisited the consideration factors as we reviewed the input from the public. There was a balance of perspectives provided in the feedback, including several comments of support and appreciation. It was important to the committee that the concerns and considerations brought forth, particularly from Larrabee families, be weighed considerably in the final recommendation. Our committee incorporated input to make the following change to our recommendation:

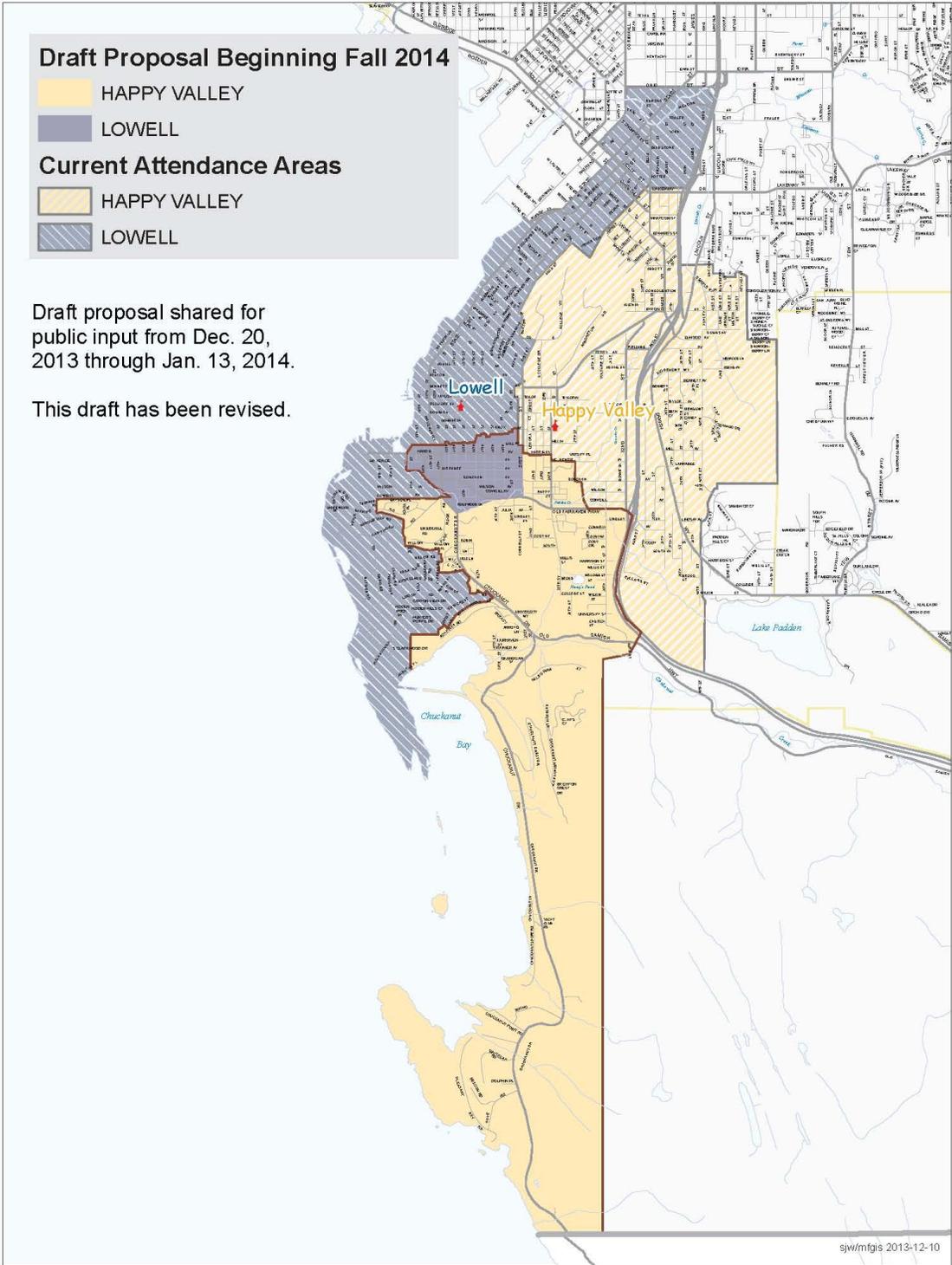
- **Hawthorne/4th Street/Bayside Loop Area:** We heard concerns about the neighborhood near Fairhaven Middle School attending Happy Valley instead of Lowell. Some expressed their feelings that this area should be included as part of the Lowell service area because of neighborhood continuity. They also had safety concerns related to walking to a bus stop. Further, a Lowell bus already drives in this area, which is also within the one-mile walking radius of Lowell. Feedback from families placed a higher priority on walkability over bus transportation. Therefore taking into account our consideration factors along with this input, our committee is recommending a modification to the original proposal. This recommendation establishes a boundary line between Happy Valley and Lowell along Hawthorne Road (see map). Specifically, students living on the northwest side of Hawthorne would attend Lowell and the southeast side would attend Happy Valley. This would create greater neighborhood continuity and eliminate the need for students to cross Hawthorne Road and they would no longer need to walk along streets without sidewalks or around blind corners to reach their bus stop.

The six current Bellingham Public Schools families directly affected by this particular change have been contacted by district staff and enthusiastically endorse it. Of the six families in this area, three currently attend Lowell through the transfer process, two were planning to apply for a transfer request and one was fine with attending Happy Valley, but said this change to Lowell would work better for their family.

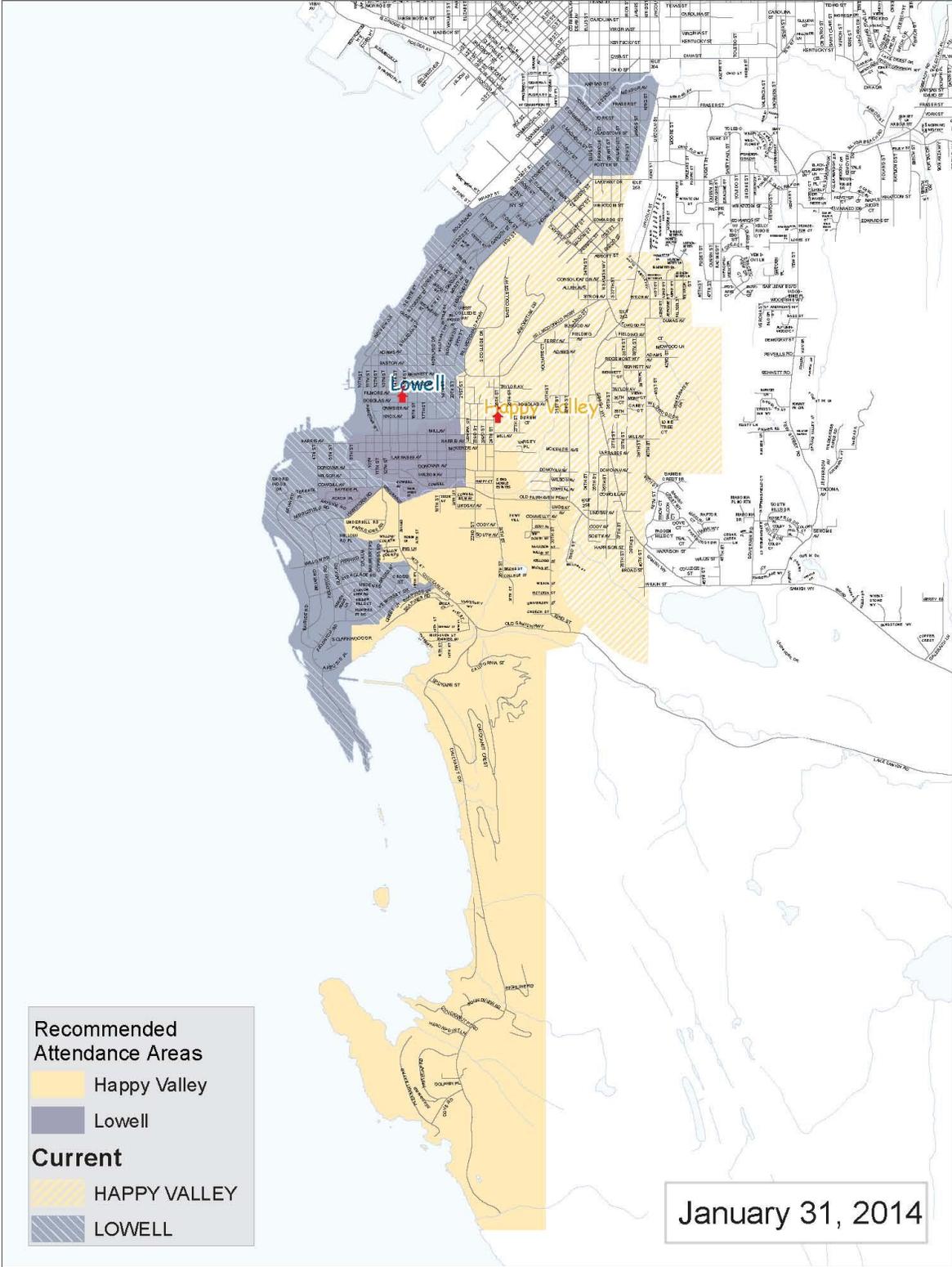
The initial proposal is depicted in the map below entitled Draft Proposal. This area is described as follows:

Happy Valley: Areas east of 21st street and north of Fairhaven Parkway (except 15th and Rosewood Lane south of Fairhaven Parkway), including Varsity Village apartments; Fairhaven Middle School/Park Ridge/Willow Court neighborhood; 22nd, 24th, and 30th streets south of Fairhaven Parkway; Briza/Chuckanut Bay village area; all of Chuckanut Drive south to boundary.

Lowell: All areas north of Fairhaven Parkway and west of 21st Street (including south to Padden Creek).



As stated above, the revision we are proposing to formulate our recommendation to you establishes a boundary line between Happy Valley and Lowell along Hawthorne Road as the only change to the original proposal. Specifically, students living on the northwest side of Hawthorne would attend Lowell and the southeast side would attend Happy Valley (see map below).



Recommended Attendance Areas

- Happy Valley
- Lowell

Current

- HAPPY VALLEY
- LOWELL

January 31, 2014

In addition, we spent significant time discussing the following issues, but decided not to alter our recommendation based on the input received.

- The feedback included a desire to send students to Lowell instead of Happy Valley who live along the southern part of Chuckanut Drive and throughout Edgemoor for neighborhood continuity. We discussed these points in light of our consideration factors. However, keeping these areas going to Happy Valley helps to:
 - Ensure greater socio-economic balance between Happy Valley and Lowell;
 - Our recommended boundaries may also help promote greater equity in potential family/PTA involvement at both schools from the Edgemoor neighborhood;
 - Avoid additional transportation costs; and
 - Maintain some of the existing boundaries.

Our committee understands that the proposed distribution of students might necessitate the installation of a portable at Lowell while new classrooms are being added. We also understand that our recommendation means that the current Highly Capable Learner (HCL) Program at Happy Valley, which uses three portables (three weeks on and three weeks off), will need to be modified or the program moved to another location. The three portables currently in use would need to be used as classrooms until the new school is built.

Next Steps

Upon submitting this recommendation to you, our committee plans to share an update with families at Larrabee, Happy Valley and Lowell elementary schools since receiving their input earlier this month. Adjusting any attendance areas is a complex task that, through many hours of conversation, we have discovered will not please all families. However, we do have an existing transfer process that may address some of these concerns.

In conclusion, this recommendation represents our very best thinking. We have invested a significant amount of time discussing all of the input we received, and believe this recommendation will best serve our students and families, according to our established criteria. The principals, staff and parents at Happy Valley and Lowell who are on our committee have repeatedly expressed how all Larrabee students and families will be welcomed, loved and cared for at their receiving school.

We have been grateful for your role in this process as a listener and observer by attending many of our meetings and the input session, while allowing our committee to work together to address questions, issues and concerns. We also appreciated having a timeline for our work, knowing that you plan to make a decision on this recommendation by the end of February. Please contact our committee if you have additional questions or need more information.