



Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee

Community Input Session/Birchwood Elementary

Feb. 15, 2017

Rob McElroy, Executive Director and co-chair of the Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee, welcomed everyone to tonight's input session. He asked everyone to identify (by the raising of hands) if they have high school, middle school or elementary school students. He then reviewed the information that will be covered at this evening's meeting and shared that at this time the committee is looking at the growth in the northern end of the school district and a lack of growth in the central part of Bellingham. Growth is causing Cordata Elementary to be over capacity, as well as Squaticum High School (SQHS). Bellingham High School (BHS) is decreasing in enrollment. There is also a somewhat large discrepancy in the poverty rates at the high schools.

Rob shared that the committee has met 5 times and noted that the minutes from those meetings can be found on the [website](#). He reviewed the 8 consideration factors that are contained in Policy 3130 and noted that, while they are each important on their own, they do sometimes conflict with each other.

Steve Clarke, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, then introduced himself. He reiterated that the committee has been working on ways to increase enrollment at BHS and decrease enrollment at SQHS. The ideal enrollment for our high schools is between 1000 and 1150 students. Steve showed maps of the current high school attendance areas, as well as the current enrollment of BHS and SQHS and the free/reduced meal rates for both schools. The gap in those rates between the schools can be reduced, although it likely will not be dramatically changed with this first phase of work.

Steve talked about the growth that is occurring on the north side of town, particularly surrounding Cordata Elementary. All of that growth also falls within the current SQHS attendance area. There is not much growth forecast over the next several years for the area contained within BHS's current attendance area. He talked about the recommendation that the committee is proposing to send to the superintendent, Dr. Baker, which will move the students living in the Birchwood neighborhood to BHS.

Question: Is it true that some of the outlying areas in the Birchwood neighborhood will not be included in the change?

Answer: There are some areas within the Birchwood Elementary attendance area that will not be moving from SQHS to BHS.

Steve stated that the committee is looking for input on the proposed changes.

Steve stated that there will be some phasing in of the moves, as it is expected that all of next year's seniors will likely want to remain at SQHS. Those requests will be granted. It may also be that many of next year's juniors would also be able to stay, and many of those requests could also be granted. There will be a gradual phase-in over the next few years.

Question: How many transfers in total will be approved?

Answer: It is hoped that the enrollment at BHS will increase by 75 to 100 for 2017-18, within an additional 30 for each of the following 2 years.

Question: What is planned for phase 2?

Answer: More of the attendance areas within the district will be looked at by this committee.

Comment: Some of these kids have already changed schools due to attendance area changes over the past several years (when Birchwood was closed for the re-build and when the new Birchwood was opened).

Comment: A lot of the students and families face many challenges and could use the consistency of their school attendance area not changing.

Question: What happens when all of the schools are maxed out?

Answer: The City of Bellingham has provided expected growth patterns over the next 20 years (through 2026). A task force will be formed soon to look at the potential for building an additional school and making renovations to schools that would create more space for growth.

Question: Where will the funds come from?

Answer: It is anticipated that a bond measure will be presented to the community.

Question: Isn't Options High School (OHS) being built to accommodate 300 students?

Answer: Yes, next year OHS will be moving into its new facility, which will free up space at BHS. Creating the balance now will help to alleviate problems that could occur in 3-4 years if we don't do something now.

Question: Will this neighborhood experience another attendance area change in phase 2?

Answer: It is not anticipated that the students impacted by this proposed change would experience another attendance area change as a result of phase 2.

Question: Were there other options considered, or was this always the plan?

Answer: Several scenarios were considered. The committee used the consideration factors in Policy 3130 and arrived at this proposed recommendation as the best scenario. The committee worked to come up with a recommendation that would not be "undone" in phase 2, and they also worked to minimize the number of schools and students impacted in phase 1.

Rob asked that three smaller groups be formed to give everyone a chance to give their feedback. Those small groups consisted of next year's 9-12 grade families; next year's 6-8 grade families; and next year's PreK-5 families. He reminded the group that the survey is also open until the committee meets tomorrow afternoon.

Feedback

Elementary School:

- What about Alderwood families?
- McLeod Road – kids split (north side of McLeod to SQHS, south side to BHS)
- Best news!
- What are the socio-economics of the Alderwood tiles – Bennett, McAlpine, etc.?
- Better social connections for students with other students in their neighborhood if neighborhood closer.
- Seaview also easy access to BHS
- Able to go to Running Start and then BHS, easier bus service
- Maximum capacity of high schools
- Phase 2 – worry about balancing too far versus neighborhoods

Middle School:

- Multiple moves by Birchwood families (Birchwood to Cordata to Birchwood to Shuksan)
- Challenge to justify being switched
- Difficult to build the community over the years due to the changes
- Separating kids from middle to high school is a concern, friend groups
- Happy due to the distance – it makes more sense due to safe transport/geographically
- Long term “knowing” where you go is lost with the change

High School:

- Some work needs to be done to look at I-5 as a better physical boundary, rather than divide one side of McLeod from the other side of McLeod.
- The west boundary follows the city limits, but how about Bennett as the divider?
- Why not include AW in this phase?
- What about juniors who have no other transportation option than the school bus?
- In the McLeod/Rusley area, Azalea Place is the only road on the south side of the street between Northwest and Maplewood. There are three high school students there who should stay with the rest of their neighborhood.
- On the map, the county line seems like a good boundary, but not when it involves families and neighbors. Don't divide up the neighbors.
- This year's 8th graders have been through a lot of change (starting at Birchwood, moving to Cordata, back to Birchwood when rebuilt).