

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SITE  
October 22, 2014 4:00-6:00  
Central Services, Room 205

Rob McElroy welcomed everyone and introduced himself and Anda Adams. He then introduced Superintendent Dr. Greg Baker, who welcomed everyone and asked that each attendee introduce themselves and take a moment to talk about their connection and interest in the Gordon Carter Environmental Site. Many attendees talked about attending the Conservation Site as a student, teacher, or community member. Dr. Baker then talked about his excitement for the future of the site. We live in an area rich with outdoor opportunities, but many of our students have not been able to participate in outdoor activities. Three years ago, the Facilities Task Force made a proposal to add conservation site improvements to the recommendation, and a think tank was formed to talk about a vision for the site. Dr. Baker would like to create an environmental site that is somewhere between the “nothing” that we have at this time and the five star North Cascades Institute (NCI). The vision is to have the site serve many more programs than currently exist. He thanked everyone for investing time in creating that vision.

Rob was first acquainted with the site when he was a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, and at that time Bellingham School District (BSD) 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes had an environmental program which included an overnight stay for the students. The site is 130 acres and is located on the South end of Lake Whatcom.

Rob and Anda led the group through an exercise of creating a historical timeline for the site, which included:

- 1918 - Whatcom County purchased the site for \$1. The Deed states the land was for the use of the common benefit and use of the Whatcom County school children.
- 1954 - The BSD traded an elementary school no longer in use (Lincoln School) for the site. Gordon Carter was the Superintendent at that time.
- 1960 - 6<sup>th</sup> grade program started.
- 1965 – A-frame was built
- 1960s - Pioneer cabin was built.
- 1972 – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade program began.
- 1979 - Site was renamed as the Gordon L. Carter Environmental Education Site.
- Late 1970s and early 1980s the Adirondacks were built.
- 1985 - Ropes course was built.
- 1987 - Additional logging was performed, which generated funds for the district.
- 1990s - The pioneer cabin was rebuilt.
- 2010- Friends of Gordon Carter (non-profit organization) was formed to raise funds in support of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pioneer program.
- 2014 – A-frame was deconstructed.

A question was raised regarding when BSD students began attending the Mountain School program at (NCI). Rob stated that the BSD began funding the program for all 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during the 2013-14 school year (although several schools had been participating in the program for years, supported by fundraising and family support).

Anda and Rob shared some video clips of both the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pioneer program and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade environmental program.

Rob asked the group to share any other known uses for the site, which consisted of:

- Sedro-Woolley School District has used the site.
- The ropes course has been used by other organizations.
- Biking, walking, some parties (have seen remnants).
- Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts.
- Huxley students.

Because there is not water, sewer, power, etc., it has only been used for a short time each year.

Rob distributed copies of The Bellingham Promise and talked briefly about The Promise, with special emphasis on the 16 outcomes. He asked everyone to identify areas where the site could make contributions towards The Promise.

Rob also talked about the timeline of the Bond Projects that the district has coming up.

Anda shared a short video from ABC News, highlighting an outdoor program for kindergarten students – “Cedarsong”. Staff and students conduct the entire school day outdoors every day, no matter what the weather is. The program is interest-led (the children direct the day).

In thinking of possibilities for the site, what could the site be used for? How might we:

- Develop historians and global thinkers
- Develop healthy, active individuals
- Develop critical thinkers and problem solvers
- Develop leaders, collaborators, team players
- Develop well-founded individuals

Small groups were formed to:

- Generate ideas for how the site might develop a Promise outcome
- Choose one main idea to build out further
- Share your big ideas with the whole group

Share-out from the 4 groups included:

How might we develop leaders, collaborators and team players?

- High school students mentoring elementary school students, which would include training quality leaders.
- All high school students would work with other high school students, collaboration amongst schools.

### How do you develop critical thinkers and problem solvers?

- Have youth participate in developing the site – participate in this group, develop curriculum, building structures, on-site problem-solving, older students mentoring younger students.
- Relevant, meaningful concrete connections.

### Historian and Global Thinkers:

- Expand on current programs.
- Take a human and nature relationship – more science.
- Engineering projects – dams?
- Storm water tie-in for 5<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Citizen science.

### Well-Rounded Community Members:

- Service Learning
- Farm-to-Table
- Teambuilding
- Ensure the process is a continual engagement of students and adults to develop and grow the site
- Artistic retreat for students inspired by nature
- High school survivor course

The same groups then spent some time thinking about what the barriers are, what would stop us from realizing these visions, and also what it would take to address these obstacles. The share out included:

- Staffing, sustaining interest of the community, being in a watershed, bathrooms/lack thereof, money, transportation to/from Bellingham, maintenance, signage, limited ecosystem, in Sedro-Woolley.
- Risk management, lack of curriculum, time, involved stakeholders (brings kids into the discussion), speakers from WWU and community to speak on the value of the site, zoning.
- District talking about the building – it could be a barrier; transportation; codes; staffing; distance from the schools.
- Money (bond was about building things); sustainability of staffing and the program; grants, partnerships will help to make good use of facilities.

Rob talked about potential next steps. There are three meetings set, with the hope of an outcome for the purpose of the site. There are some restrictions with bond funds. Could we come up with a recommended timeline for short and long term? Should we be thinking of some work groups that would meet prior to the next meeting? For instance, would it be helpful for a few people to meet and bring back some information regarding zoning and what can/cannot be done at the site as it pertains to zoning?

The district tried to drill for water once but was not successful. It would not be a major barrier to bring electricity to the site. The possibility of compostable toilets, septic, etc. would be dependent on the level of use.

Rob asked if there would be an interest in a site visit on a Saturday morning, and there were several people interested.

What do we do between now and December 10?

- Site visit.
- Small work groups.

Small work group possibilities could include:

- Sustainable construction.
- Look at K-12 curriculum to see what exists and what is missing and what programming would need to take place.
- Whatcom Museum has cultural history, City of Bellingham works with 5<sup>th</sup> grade and others regarding water quality, tribal connections.
- Learn about gold level standards for programming that already exists for public schools – sources of inspiration rather than copying another program.
- Know what barriers there are (transportation, curriculum, risk management).
- Pre-thinking around a mission/vision statement.
- Cost example of how much things cost – maybe part of the barrier committee.

Rob suggested that a mission/purpose statement could be drafted that would allow the group to create a focus relating to moving forward with the bond project (water, power, shelter).

Anda asked that everyone sign up for any small work group that you are interested in, and Rob & Anda will be in touch with regard to moving forward.

There will be a field trip to the site on Saturday morning, November 8, from 8:00-10:00 a.m. Please let Rob or Anda know if you are able to attend.

Final words and feedback from the group:

- Like the people in this room
- Like that we're having this conversation
- Big picture thinking
- Would like to see what else happens everywhere else
- Wishes my kids could be outside more hours of the day
- Likes the possibilities for people making connections outdoors
- Wish we had more time to work on this
- Like being part of a community that thinks about this – what if all children grew up with a
- What if we lived like the earth matters
- I like that I heard the Sup be excited and genuinely interested
- Like/love that we are talking about the cons site and loved the ideas
- I am pumped that BSD is psyched about doing this and we are all investing time
- What if all kids got to play outside and loved it
- Like that there is money to do this
- Wish I had a clear path as a facilitator, but like the fact that this is organic
- Like the fact that we are here now talking about this, well in advance of when we will be making decisions, likes the organic path
- I like that of all of the places I could have done my residency, this is where I ended up
- What if we could make this a real possibility through the expansion of the site