

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SITE  
December 10, 2014 4:00-6:00  
Central Services, Board Room

Rob McElroy welcomed everyone and started the meeting at 4:10 pm. He noted that a few from the group had communicated that they were unable to attend today. Because there are three new members of the group, a few minutes were spent on introductions.

Rob reviewed the agenda for the meeting, as well as the purpose/charge for this group. Anda Adams and Rob also summarized what occurred at the October 22, 2014 meeting, as well as some of the work that small work groups have done since that meeting. Five work groups have been formed to focus on different aspects of this project:

1. Community Partnerships & Student Voices
2. Guiding Principles
3. Understanding Current Programming
4. Inspiration from Other Sites/Programs
5. Setting the Parameters (Known Barriers)

Anda requested that about 30 minutes be spent in the small focus groups, followed by sharing out of work/thoughts so far:

Parameters/Known Barriers Group

Curtis Lawyer shared information on the zoning regulations and construction considerations.

- Zoning is “Rural Forestry Zone” in the Lake Whatcom subarea.
- As far as the bond parameters, we must undertake a feasibility study, design, and infrastructure - including water, electricity, septic, and construct a large group structure.
- The total budget is \$2 million. This would include design fees, permitting, surveying, geotechnical investigation, SEPA, furniture/equipment, legal fees, printing, testing and inspection, and sales tax. Power would be approximately \$15,000. To dig for a well (including pump, well house and testing) would be approximately \$30,000. The costs of a septic would depend on usage (i.e. occupancy of site/building footprint, the amount of activity use) and is estimated to be between \$100,000 and \$500,000. Phone and data would also be needed.
- Other considerations would be the usable structures and concrete pads where structures were previously located. Some consideration should be given to clearing/rehabbing existing trails and the entry drive. An assessment should be made of existing structures for structural suitability, etc.
- All of these considerations, as well as a 5,000 square foot building (estimated at \$1.1 million) would bring the total cost to approximately \$2 million. For comparison, most of the newer school cafeterias in the Bellingham Public Schools are approximately 2,500 square feet; gym spaces are approximately 3,000 to 3,500 square feet.

Steve Ruthford showed us various types of structures – lower impact to higher impact, including tents, yurts, open air learning spaces, lean-tos, reused materials (container-style), combination of open/closed spaces, multiple buildings (similar to those at NCI) (*see attached PPT for details*).

Rob reminded the group that programming costs would not come out of the \$2 million. He shared the 2007-08 school year site expenditures, which were over \$88,000 for the approximate 2-3 months of use

of the site with two grade levels. We need to be aware that, depending on the programming recommended, the district would need to allocate budget for those costs. There will also need to be some administrative oversight. There was discussion about the chance to offset costs if other organizations used/rented the site in some capacity when it is not being used by the Bellingham School District.

Steve talked about some discussions with Camp Firwood regarding a high ropes course. If we decided to keep the high ropes course, it would be the fourth in the county. It is likely that our ropes course would fail inspection and necessitate rebuilding (ranging from \$30,000 to \$100,000). Annual inspection, certification, etc. would run around 10-15 percent of the construction costs. Insurance would be another consideration as far as maintenance costs.

#### Guiding Principles Group

Amy overviewed a Vision, Mission and Core Values (*see attached PPT for details*) that she drafted prior to this meeting (this group was not able to meet between the October 22 meeting and this meeting). There was discussion in the large group about the possibility of looking at a biophilic design; the need to have buy-in from students, teachers and administration; and need for adaptability because of the likelihood of changes in site uses over time.

#### Programming Group:

Teri Herda had made contact with all of the building principals, asking what outdoor education opportunities currently exist for elementary, middle and high levels. She shared the feedback (not all schools had responded). The group recommended determining one program at each of the 3 levels (elementary, middle, high) that could be the focus in the immediate term – updated Pioneer program for 3<sup>rd</sup>, expanded ecology program for all 6<sup>th</sup> grades, and field-based service learning for AP Environmental Science (*see attached PPT for details*).

Anda asked what it would take to expand the current Whatcom Middle School program to all four middle schools. WWU would need to quadruple the resources and manpower in order for this to be possible. A larger window of time would also need to be taken into consideration in order to share the site among all of the middle schools. The organization of middle school teachers and parents for carpooling would be another consideration. Transportation could be a barrier that should be discussed. Rob pointed out that the group will likely need to look at a roll-out of different programs – it will not all happen at once.

#### Inspiration Group

Ideas included:

- Consider looking at the Wascowitz Environmental Leadership School at Camp Wascowitz. The program serves the students of Highline Public Schools, as well as students from surrounding schools and districts through environmental education and team building programs. This could be an opportunity for struggling youth as an alternative to suspension and expulsion.
- Career/Technical programs for the middle school and high school levels.
- Be intentional about linking the programs we have now - such as Common Threads, school garden programs, experiences that lead up to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Mountain School experience, youth leadership programs to build leadership skills from elementary to middle to high.
- Keep in mind students with special needs and making sure access is for all students.
- Curtis Lawyer talked about a company in Seattle that builds portable buildings to specifications - [theseedcollaborative.org](http://theseedcollaborative.org).

Anda suggested that the group talk about what needs to take place in order to start moving towards drafting a recommendation to Dr. Baker. Discussion included:

- Amy will work on refining the guiding principles.
- Rob suggested that it would be useful to have some building criteria.
- It would be helpful to have some programming recommendations from each level.
- Gene Meyers suggested that each group present three different levels of recommendations.
- The inspirations group could perhaps take a look at some existing programs and facilities.

The district will start to develop budget plans at the end of January in preparation for the 2015-16 school year. Anda suggested that the small groups try to move their work forward so when we come back together on January 21, there can be some discussion about what recommendations can be made, as well as those that will need to wait a little longer for a recommendation.

Anda will communicate with the entire group next week.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm.