



MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendent Greg Baker

FROM: Bob Kuehl, assistant superintendent, human resources, co-chair
Jeff Tetrick, director of teaching and learning, co-chair
on behalf of the Facilities Planning Task Force

DATE: December 1, 2021

SUBJECT: Facilities Plan Recommendation

In fall 2012, Bellingham Public Schools convened a Facilities Planning Task Force of over 40 members representing staff, students, community members, parents and alumni. The task was to identify and prioritize major facility improvement projects for Bellingham Public Schools for the next 10 years and to identify specific projects for a bond issue to put before voters the following November 2013. The 2013 bond passed followed by another in February 2018 allowing the district to further support a collective commitment to the children of Bellingham through its learning environments.

As of 2021, most facilities projects from the 10-year plan are complete, under construction or poised for planning. However, some additional funding is needed to complete the projects due to construction cost increases above estimates originally developed before the pandemic and refinements we have made to our project specifications over the years. As the vision set forth by these two groups is closing in on completion, Bellingham Public Schools issued another public call for a new Facilities Planning Task Force. In late September 2021, a group of 33 staff, students, community members, parents, alumni and City of Bellingham representatives were convened charged with the following list of tasks:

- Review long-term recommendations from the previous Facilities Planning Task Forces, originally formed in 2012 and 2017.
- Learn about schools and facilities related to current and future educational program needs; the physical condition of existing schools/facilities; how facilities are funded; and the process associated with voter-approved bond ballot measures.
- Validate the relevance of the previous framework of recommendations to the superintendent for a bond issue to put before voters as early as February 2022 that may include:
 - Building a new facility for the Community Transitions (CT) program and



- maximize opportunities for other, future district program facility improvements.
- Build a 15th elementary school initially as a swing space for students as other elementary schools are rebuilt.
- Begin the design for the replacement of three current, highest need elementary schools (Carl Cozier, Columbia, and Roosevelt) and set the stage for a future bond to fund their construction.
- Support the completion of previous-approved bond projects (Sunnyland Elementary School, Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site, District Office, Squalicum and Bellingham high school fields) in response to escalating construction costs.
- Invest in improvements at numerous schools adding inclusive play structures and play fields, additional classrooms, roof and air circulation systems, exterior painting, and equipment to support additional sustainable practices.
- Review suggested range of funds required for projects listed above.

The new Facility Planning Task Force kicked off Sept. 23, 2021 with its first meeting on Zoom. After introductions and establishing norms, the committee was led through a discussion and subsequent exercise to establish guiding principles that would shape the conversation for the remainder of our time together as a group and help us validate our decisions and eventual recommendation outlined below.

In the meetings that remained, the committee heard presentations from district experts on the history of facilities and costs of construction. We learned about the district's vision for Community Transitions, the future of sustainable practices, and inclusive and accessible learning environments. Each presentation outlined the current state of the program along with aspirational goals for each topic in support of The Bellingham Promise. Committee chairs and other Bellingham Public School leaders participated in the process by answering questions in large group meetings, capturing feedback during discussions, and supporting facilitation in virtual collaborative breakout rooms at first and then ultimately in two final, in-person meetings.

The result was consensus around a recommendation to move forward with all previously outlined goals and with added recommendations that the committee felt necessary to reinforce the key strategies of The Bellingham Promise and the guiding principles developed in that very first meeting.

The following is a list of projects included in the 2022 bond recommendation with a description of the main driving forces behind why they were chosen.

Recommendation regarding building a new facility for the Community Transitions Program: The committee heard from Analisa Ficklin, the assistant director for Special



Education and her team along with students served in CT. A video tour of the program provided a window into a curriculum that delivers technical, occupational and independent living skills to some of the district's most vulnerable students. We watched as the teams made the most of overutilized spaces that lack proper size, configuration and intention specific to that program. We learned about the need for multiple, on-site, unique learning environments and the complexities of finding a location with easy access to transportation and higher education programs. We also learned of the need for added space in the high school program that relocating CT could provide.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that a new facility for Community Transitions be included in this bond.

Recommendation regarding the 15th elementary school: Part of the committee's charge was to determine if building a new 15th elementary school on the district's King Mountain property is appropriate for this bond. Review of building conditions, enrollment projections, and the district's standards for functional performance show that Carl Cozier, Columbia, and Roosevelt elementary schools need replacement in order to support the mission, vision and other key elements in The Bellingham Promise. Upon further review it is clear those sites are not large enough to sustain the type of construction required of a complete replacement while maintaining a safe environment for students to learn and a comprehensive school to operate. These assessments confirm the need for an elementary "swing space" or an alternative location to temporarily house students during construction. After being used as a temporary space for Carl Cozier, Columbia and Roosevelt, this school would eventually become the district's 15th elementary school.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that building a 15th elementary school be included in this bond.

Recommendation regarding the design for the replacement of Carl Cozier, Columbia, and Roosevelt elementary schools for future-funded construction: Although Bellingham Public Schools manages to maintain its older facilities and strives to be the best stewards of its resources, there are three elementary school facilities that have exceeded their expected life spans due to aging building systems and continuing advances in education practices.

Members of the committee toured the facilities and were quick to note the difference between those and our newly completed elementary schools. The 2017 Facilities Planning Task Force recognized the need for these schools to be replaced but held off including them in their recommendation due to the complexity and compact nature of the sites and tax impact implications of three additional schools in the 2018 bond. This task force recognizes the need for the replacement of these schools and an urgency that indicates the need to begin design in advance of a next bond knowing the intention to prioritize funds for their construction when the task force meets again.



Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that funds to begin the design for replacement schools of Carl Cozier, Columbia, and Roosevelt elementary schools be included in this bond.

Recommendation regarding funding support for previous, approved bond projects: The committee reviewed the five projects not yet completed from previously approved bonds: Sunnyland replacement; the Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site; District Office replacement; and Squalicum and Bellingham high school fields and expansion of tennis courts including LED lighting and support storage, restrooms and concessions buildings.

The district was able to easily demonstrate escalation in construction costs, supply chain issues, shortages in manpower, and general pricing uncertainty because of COVID-19, which led to the resulting cost overruns in many projects from the last bond. Because these projects fell later in the queue, they suffer from an unavoidable lack of available funds caused by the escalations shown.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that funding support for previous, approved bond projects be included in this bond.

Recommendation regarding facility improvements at numerous schools: An important part of every bond is funding to protect and maintain the investments in our existing facilities by replacing aging systems. Additionally, we understand the need to continually improve safety, site accessibility and sustainable practices throughout the district.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that facility improvements at numerous schools be included in this bond.

Recommendation regarding sustainable practices at district facilities: An extensive discussion concerning the future of sustainable practices at Bellingham Public Schools transpired over multiple meetings. In the end, the group agreed that additional consideration should be made to reinforce our commitment to sustainable practices, to minimize the effects of long-term operating costs from energy and water consumption, and to expand education in our schools about environmental stewardship.

It was noted that innovative thinking around sustainability has been our district practice for years with many of our schools exceeding minimal requirements set by the state. However, as a result, many of those same schools are at the point of diminishing returns for retroactive improvements to existing systems. The 15th elementary school was noted as a prime location to take a more proactive approach with a bonus of its impact to multiple communities in its use as a swing space.



While the impact of these improvements may appear limited when implemented only at one site, we agree that focusing multiple sustainable strategies at one site amplifies their impact and will help the district determine a path toward how we implement sustainable practices at all our schools in the future.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee that added funds be considered for this bond allowing the district to take the next significant step in developing a higher sustainability standard for our buildings and to create a model for what we want our future schools to be.

Recommendation regarding fully inclusive play structures and accessibility at district facilities: In addition to sustainable practices, the importance of increased accessible and inclusive learning environments was highlighted in multiple meetings. The completion of Alderwood and Parkview elementary schools, the soon to be complete new Sunnyland elementary, the addition of two inclusive play structures in this bond recommendation and the eventual completion of Carl Cozier, Columbia, and Roosevelt elementary schools will leave five elementary schools that will not yet have fully inclusive play structures. The committee understands the complexities of the remaining sites and that a feasibility study is underway with outcomes yet to be determined.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this committee to set an ultimate goal for all elementary schools to provide fully inclusive play structures and that any additional funds found to be available for this bond be used to address as many of these sites as possible with prioritized consideration for sites with special programs.

Financial impact and summary of recommendations

Sensitive to the concerns of a community emerging from the uncertainty of COVID-19, the financial impact of any bond recommendation at this time was weighed carefully. As estimates for each project began to solidify, the committee reviewed a range of recommendation amounts with the goal of maximizing the impact across the district and with a long-range plan in mind. We arrived on a recommendation that meets many of the greatest needs and sets up the district for success in future bonds.

The approximate total cost of the projects included in our recommendation results in a \$115 million bond measure. We understand that if passed, the combined tax rate for schools (levies and bonds) will increase by \$17.21/month or \$207/year in 2023 (compared with 2022) for a median homeowner in Bellingham.

This measure is recommended to be put before voters in February 2022.