Best Practices for School Development and Siting in King County School Districts

A Guide for Districts and King County

Issaquah High School. Photo: Joe, Monkey Puzzle Blog

CEP 460 Final Report
King County School Siting Group
December 6th, 2013
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Introduction

This report focuses on best practices for school siting in districts in King County that border rural areas. It covers public health, community development, environmental sustainability, and costs to district, taxpayers, and state as critical factors in school siting decisions. The report also includes recommendations as well as a memo to school districts located within King County, and offers a literature review as tool that King County can use in communicating the benefits of centrally-located schools to school districts and stakeholders. Although we originally would have liked to incorporate primary source material into our research, we were unable to reach school district representatives or the State Superintendent for interviews.

The contents of this report are significant because they serve as a bridge that can help King County and its school districts understand each other's needs and hopefully improve their working relationship around this issue. The underlying principle of our work is the idea that when stakeholders work together to form agreeable solutions, the end user - in this case, children in our community - is the one who receives maximum benefit. This report relates to work that the county has already done in laying out policy and procedures for growth management., and expands upon that work by identifying potential social benefits and in-depth analysis of relevant WAC's and RCW's. It provides school districts with innovative ways to serve their community members while also complying with the GMA. Most importantly, however, this report aims for a neutral perspective that appreciates both sides of the issue, and seeks for a middle ground so that the needs of all stakeholders may be met.

The report begins with a history of the issues surrounding this topic, the context in which they reside, and barriers that have prevented school districts from yielding to the GMA. Next, we discuss the fieldwork experience and examine the King County school districts pose challenges and points of contention. After this groundwork is laid, we display the research we have found on school siting's impact on public health, community development, environmental sustainability, costs to the districts, taxpayers, and state. We conclude our report with recommendations for both county and school districts, which have been derived from our research. Our appendix includes a memorandum for King County to give to school district officials at their discretion. The memorandum takes the big ideas from the report and poses them in a clear and succinct way. The appendix also includes a literature review and bibliography as an additional resource and as reference to the tools that we have utilized in the creation of this report.

The three of us are students at the University of Washington in the Community, Environment, and Planning major, located in the College of Built Environments.

Although we share this commonality, we each bring unique and diverse backgrounds to the table. Kate's focus is on secondary education, Margaret's focus is public policy, and Lydia's focus is on policy analysis.

History

The Washington State legislature introduced the first version of the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990 under the realization that unplanned growth could lead to irreparable harm to Washington's natural resources and critical land areas. The GMA sets limits for new growth and encourages compact development. As a result, since the GMA King County has been working with school districts throughout the siting process to determine their needs and to help them find ways to stay within set growth boundaries. However, school districts are not legally bound to build within Urban Growth Areas like counties and district, so King County cannot obligate school districts to site in accordance with the GMA.

Context

The most pressing issue with developing schools outside the Urban Growth Area is that chosen sites are often found on vulnerable land and negate the conservation efforts of local governments. Also, schools built in rural areas require a great deal more from taxpayers as new infrastructure and transportation costs go up. Currently, the funds for transportation are given to each school by the state based on district needs with no limitations on distance traveled. In the near future, incentives will be added to the current model to encourage the efficiency of school transportation routes (Management Partnership 64-67).

Fieldwork

Kate and Lydia met with our project contact, Karen Wolf, on October 11, 2013 to visit various school sites within King County. Karen Wolf is Senior Policy Analyst for King County Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget, and has been working with districts and the GMA for years. Among the sites visited were the Redmond Watershed, Redmond Union Hill Road, Redmond STEM High School, and a site in rural Issaquah. We were shown how close in proximity these sites were to watersheds and streams that support local salmon runs and ecosystems. We were informed by Karen that Renton High School was built well and in cooperation with the county and we have looked to that site as an example to guide our research.
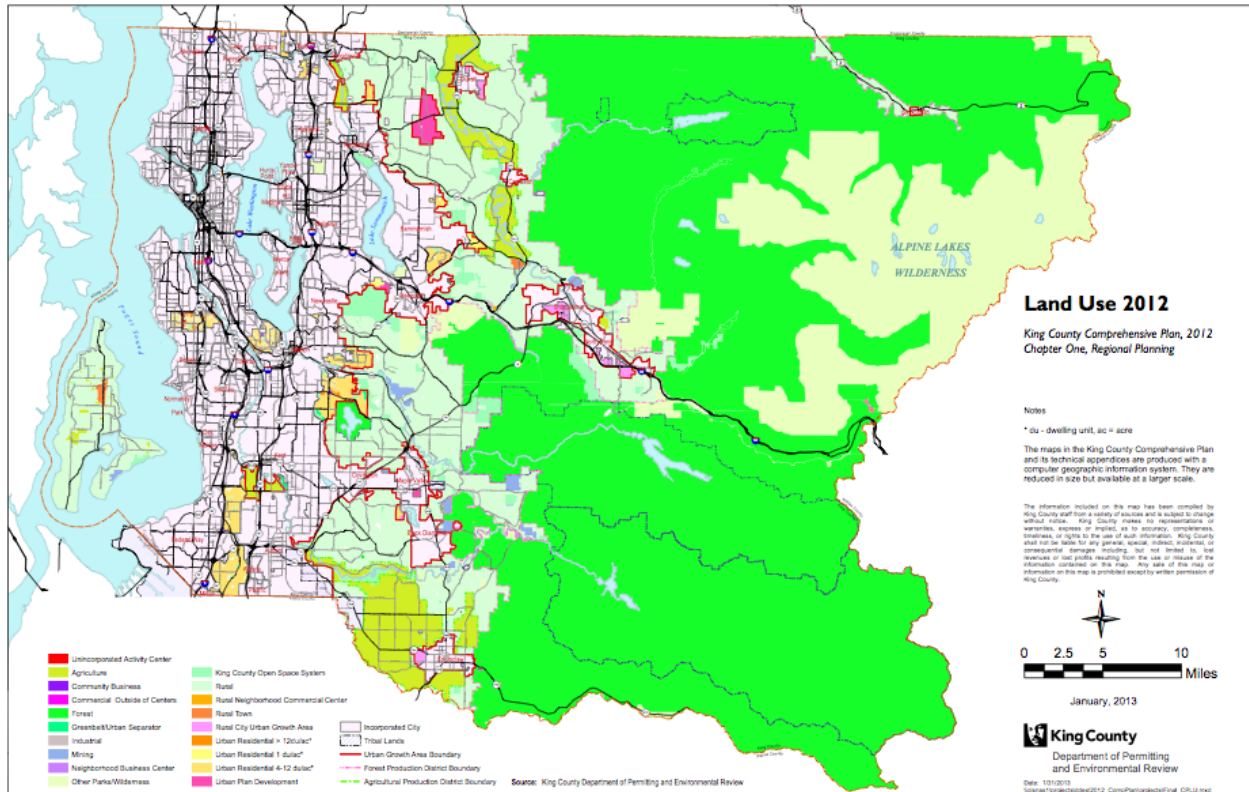
King County Land Use Designations 2012

Image: King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review
The red light green area in this image represents the "Rural" land in between the white "Urban" and the bright green "Forest" land. The red line is the designated Urban Growth Boundary, outside of which development is prohibited.

Undeveloped Public School Sites in Rural King County

The following images from show sites in yellow that school districts own outside of the red line, which designates the Urban Growth Boundary. There are several more of these sites in King County.

Undeveloped Public School Sites in Rural King County

TAHOMA 1
Site Acreage: 80.02 Acres
Zoning: RA-5
Assessed Value: $1,217,300 (school on portion)

Lake Wilderness

MAPLE VALLEY

TAHOMA 1

Urban Gorwth Boundary
Inventoried Wetlands
Salmonid Bearing Streams
Parcel Boundaries
Streets   Water

King County

Nanette Lowe[8.4.11]d:GMPC/tahoma1-undevelopedschsites
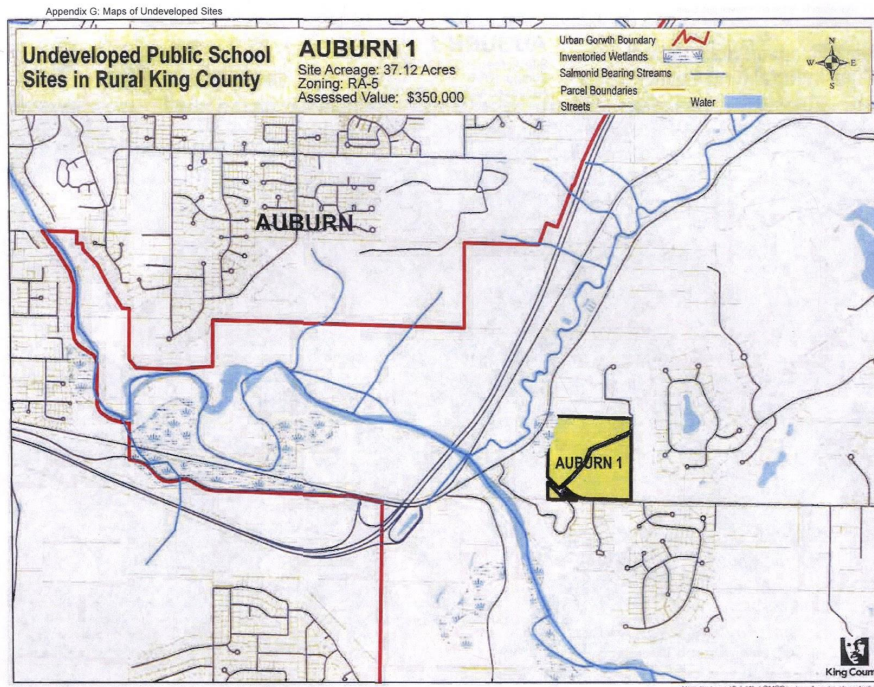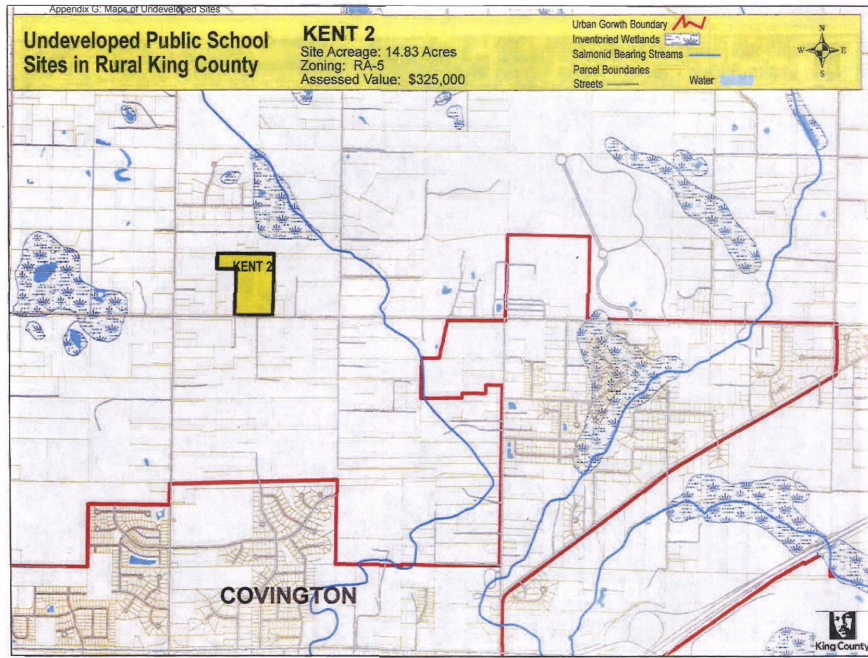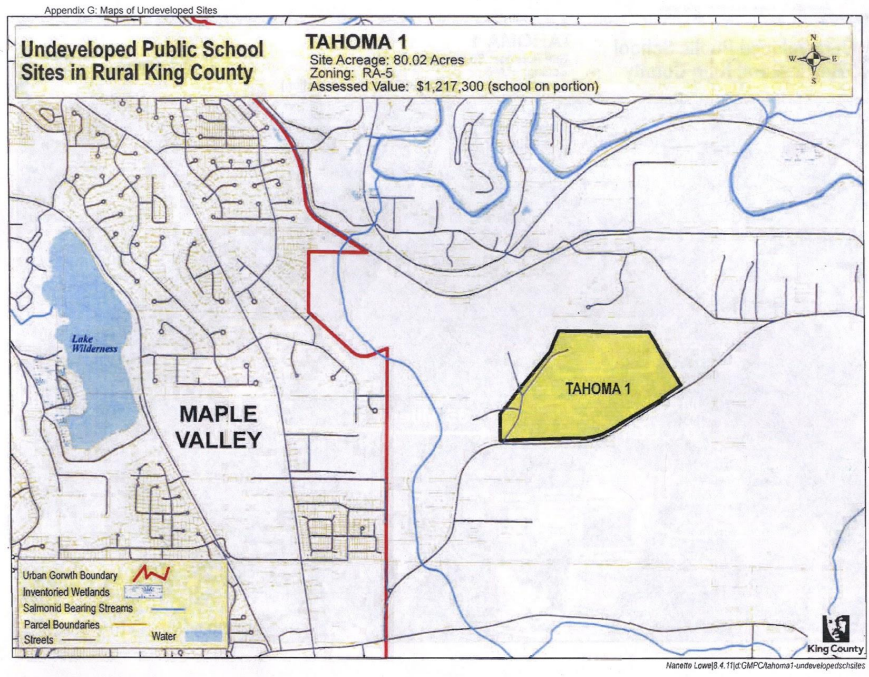
Images: King County

Barriers for School Districts

In a joint effort with King County, our group produced a survey to be sent by King County to the 9 school districts that border the Urban Growth Area. The purpose of this survey was to get a better idea of why school districts tend to site outside of the UGA and why siting inside of the UGA might be difficult for them. We got results back from 3 school districts: Lake Washington School District, Riverview School District, and Enumclaw School District. The results of our findings are as follows:

1. School districts have a higher perceived acreage need than required by state regulations.

- ❖ Multiple districts mention needing 40 acres for a comprehensive high school. Our group found that this is a misconception: as referenced on page 26, the state does not require this many acres for a high school. Additionally, districts are allowed to build on sites smaller than the recommendations if they are proved safe. For example, Renton High School is a comprehensive high school built on 26 acres. As far as we researched, we do not see the need for a 40 acre high school, and we recommend that the County follows up with these districts to ask them where that number comes from.

2. Other state requirements are straining the capacities of school districts in King County.

- ❖ All 3 school districts mentioned that new policies including state-mandated all-day kindergartens, initiatives to reduce class sizes, and the growing number of special needs students (who have a maximum class size of 12) are greatly increasing their need for space in school facilities. This should be taken into consideration by the districts and county in addition to growth rates.

3. There are actions that the county can do that school districts think would make siting easier.

- ❖ Some districts mention not being able to find suitable land within their area. They mention that certain land use modifications could be allowed case-by-case to ease this burden. School districts say that some sites near or on the UGA boundary may be suitable for a school and are open to working with King County to develop a plan that works for both parties.

Best Practices for School Development and Siting

Community Development

At first glance, community development may seem like an afterthought in the school siting process, and that logic makes a certain sense: focus on what the school district can afford and what land works best for students' education. However, by working with the community in the school-siting process, school districts can actually improve students' education, reduce costs, and improve their relationship with local governments.

Schools that are supported by the local community are shown to improve student learning, school effectiveness, family engagement, and community vitality (Bingler, Quinn, and Sullivan 5-10). Community schools create safe and healthy spaces for children and the community, and contribute greatly to the local culture and social capital, all of which in turn draw residents to the area and bolster its economic health.

Photo: David Ruderman, USAG Vicenza Public Affairs

Developing a community school should start as early as the school-siting decision process begins to attract local involvement (City of Bremerton 29; Bingler, Quinn, and Sullivan 32). Locals should be mostly behind the design of the building to create a sense of pride in the school (Norris 7). It should also be centrally-located so that

students can walk to school and the building becomes a landmark in the community (Norris 11-14). The school should be located near or share community facilities like public libraries and ballparks to reduce costs and creates community networks (City of Bremerton 28-29; McDonald 35). This can be done by opening up school facilities for public use, or by utilizing existing public amenities as they might typically be used within school grounds. The former brings the school into the daily consciousness of the community, bolstering involvement, while the latter cuts down on facilities costs as well as the land needed to build the school. However, when using public facilities, Oregon's School Siting Handbook recommends creating cooperative agreements between school districts and the local parks and recreation department to facilitate sharing and reduce conflict, which in turn has the benefit of bridging local government (University of Oregon 20). Finally, by building a school in a central area, students can have easy, even walkable access to local learning opportunities, like local community colleges, apprenticeships with local businesses, and internship and volunteer options (Norris 19).

Two local success stories demonstrate the multiple benefits to building community schools. In 2001, Spokane Public Schools finished an expansion to its Lewis and Clark High School in downtown Spokane. The school district bought up the entire block next to the school for renovations and since it's reopened it not only attracts students from other areas who wish to go the vibrant school, but it has stabilized what was a declining and increasingly derelict part of downtown (Gurwitt). In Oregon, the Bethel School District and the City of Eugene decided to split a 70-acre parcel, and now the 35-acre Meadow View School and Bethel Community park share facilities (University of Oregon iv). Of the project: "What began as a relationship lacking communication and coordination ended up as a coordinated partnership united by a common goal: community development," (University of Oregon iv).

Public Health

A centrally-located school is a great opportunity to enhance public health outcomes for students and local residents. Forty years ago almost half of children walked to school, as opposed to today when less than 14% do and a third of children are overweight or obese ("Let's Walk to School!"*)*. By siting a school closer-in and in a walkable or bikable setting, school districts can help tackle this epidemic, increase safety, and encourage healthy habits in students, their parents, and the local community. Increased physical activity has also been shown to improve learning and focus, and pedestrian activity has been correlated with increased social capital and neighborhood cohesion as well as reduced crime rates (Jensen; Leyden 1546).

Photo: Dylan Passmore

Several steps are needed to achieve these benefits. Schools need to be sited at a distance that is practical for walking and biking (National Policy & Legal 14; Norris 11). The school district also needs to insure that students can walk or bike safely to school, building sidewalks, participating in a Safe Routes to Schools program, and providing crossing guards where necessary (National Policy & Legal 19). By building a multi-story school, schools will not only use less land, but will encourage students, faculty, and staff to climb stairs throughout the day. Lastly, when schools open up their recreational facilities to public use, as mentioned in the Community Development section, they provide places for sport and movement for the local community.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is an issue in the siting and building of new public facilities. With the increase in population in many areas of King County, there is a challenge to build school facilities quickly in order to meet this demand. While the environmental impacts of a school facility may not always be the first priority when building a new school, it goes hand in hand with community health. This need for new school facilities presents an opportunity for districts in King County to utilize best practices in building new school buildings to make them long-lasting as well as informative to students about sustainability and the environment.

STEM High School in Lake Washington School District. Photo: Absher Construction Company. STEM is a sustainably designed 21-acre campus.

Where schools are sited has huge impacts on the environmental footprint of a community. Transportation to schools accounts for a large amount of vehicle and fuel use. This is not only costly to the district, community members, and state, but has detrimental environmental effects. Schools also have the potential to increase urban sprawl by encouraging families with children to move closer to them. If a school is located far from the urban center on rural land, families may choose to move in this direction and spur development of undeveloped land, increasing overall driving and fuel use to the urban center (Gurwitt).

Walkable communities are an essential component of the new movement of sustainable urban communities. The benefits of walkable communities are essential not only to sustainability but to student health, community development, safety, and social capital (National Policy & Legal 2; EPA 45). The more students can walk or bike to their school facility, the less driving and bussing has to happen (EPA 44-45). This means that it is essential to site schools within the area that most of the attending students live in. Siting a school far from the urban or residential center means that no students will be able to walk or bike to school, thus traffic, air pollution, and the carbon footprint of the community will increase (EPA 44-46).

The actual structure of the schools affects their sustainability as well. Compact, multi-story schools with a smaller overall land footprint have less of an environmental impact than larger, sprawling campuses. Additionally, large parking lots create environmental degradation by covering a large plot of land with non-porous surfaces, creating more polluting runoff into storm drains. When sited within the attendance area, a lot of this driving can be avoided, and the area covered by the school and parking lot can be lessened. An example of this is Renton High School in the Lake Washington School District, which is a beautiful brick multi-story building sited in the middle of Renton, nearby to local businesses, a transit center, churches, and the local public library. Renton high school was renovated and re-designed using recycled materials and incorporating more natural light into the building (CEFPI).

In addition, another sustainable practice is to co-site schools with other community resources. This can include siting near a community center that offers childcare or recreational activities that the students and families of the school can then conveniently use (National Policy & Legal 7). This also eliminates the creation of unnecessary duplicate facilities, such as pools and sports fields, which saves the energy and resources that are required to maintain them. Many schools in the Seattle area are co-sited with these sorts of community centers, and use the recreational facilities there rather than building their own (City of Seattle). Renton High School uses Renton Memorial Stadium a few blocks away and shares its performing arts center with the local community to reduce unnecessary new construction projects, which in turn boost community involvement.

Lastly, schools sited close to sensitive or vulnerable natural resources can cause tremendous environmental harm to these ecosystems (EPA 45). The effect of the traffic and daily walking and driving habits of the hundreds of students so close to a fragile system can be tremendous. In addition, any other recreational facilities or beneficial community services will impact the surrounding environment negatively, creating negative effects to seemingly positive community and school efforts.

Costs to District and State

There are several ways to address the financial aspect of school siting. Working relationship with local, city, and county governments better allocates funds because all stakeholders are brought to the table and all concerns are addressed. The Oregon School Siting Handbook outlines several ways in which the district can get the community involved in the decision to site or construct a new school facility. Getting the word out to the community is essential to finding a site that serves the area as a whole. The district will have a better relationship with stakeholders it it opens up the discussion

to involve them early on it in the planning process. This also adds another layer of accountability to the school district to site in areas based on community needs with less of a top-down approach (University of Oregon 18-19). The handbook from Oregon even recommends door-to-door canvassing to get the word out. Additionally, involving the community can be essential to gathering donations from local entities to help cover the costs of new school projects.

To decrease the costs of building and increase sustainability, it is preferable to renovate or expand on existing schools rather than siting new ones (National Policy & Legal 7). This also bypasses the cost of site evaluations and permitting for new school sites. Furthermore, locating schools within existing infrastructure also saves overall funds for the project. For example, siting schools on one small country road away from traffic lights is far less cost-effective in the long run than siting a school in an area in which traffic lights and crosswalks already exist (EPA 45-46).

Reducing driving to schools is also a way to reduce overall costs to the state. The State of Washington is required to pay for transportation of pupils who live outside of a one-mile radius of their school assignment (Management Partnership 9). By siting schools closer to the students residences, a lot of transportation costs are avoided. On the flipside, siting schools outside of of the urban areas that they serve increases transportation costs tremendously, both for the state as well as for families in the community who drive children to school rather than have them walk (University of Oregon 12).

In Washington State the current methodology for calculating funding for each school district for student transportation allows for high energy use and cost expenditures. This model has made it easier for school districts to site new facilities far from student's homes and urban centers, while still not being impacted by the increased cost of transportation. However, in the new model that Washington State Legislature is currently working on, efficiency will be incentivized. School districts that plan on building new facilities will benefit from planning ahead for the fact that they could incur financial gains from siting in a more sustainable way in the near future (Management Partnership 4).

Recommendations for Districts

1. Prioritize Community Development in School Siting
   - Involve the community and stakeholders in conversations about school siting
   - Site schools in urban areas for increased community involvement

2. Consider Sharing Facilities or Co-Siting Schools
   - Sharing facilities with other local institutions and community groups reduces overall costs and builds community

3. Design with an Emphasis on Walkability and Connectivity
   - Walkable schools increase student health, safety, social capital, and academic outcomes

4. Site with Consideration for Local Environmental Impact
   - Avoid siting on or near rural or environmentally sensitive areas

5. Assess Long-Term Costs to District and State
   - Maintenance of large facilities and long transportation routes can incur large costs to the district and state over a period of time

Literature Review

Bremerton School Districts: Bremerton School Siting Project 2009

Summary
This report from the Bremerton School District is an example of what one district did to involve the community in deciding on a new site for a middle school. The Bremerton School District saw that the need for a new middle school was in their future following a review of population trends. They did a study inquiring into where different community stakeholders would like to locate a new middle school. The goal was also to co-locate the school with a community facility to share certain resources and equipment. The methodology included working with community organizations and researching different problems that the community might encounter with co-location, and holding workshops to engage the community to come up with the best siting option. Included in these workshops were discussions of funding and costs of the project, comparing the cost of a compact urban site versus a larger, one-story suburban site. In the end, the school district was prepared with a site plan for the future middle school in advance of it being necessary, and the community had been involved within the process of deciding on what facilities will best served the community and within what area.

Use for Districts
This is a good example of what a district can do on its own to make school siting intentional and prioritize siting as a way to engage students and the community. In addition, through creative co-siting with other facilities and community resources, the district was able to minimize costs while maximizing community benefits and benefits to the students. The school district also did this well in advance of the need for a new school, giving plenty of time for dialogue within the community to discuss the issue. This is a model for school districts who want to be inclusive of the community in siting their schools.

Schools as Centers of Community: A Citizen's Guide for Planning and Design

Summary
This planning guide, published in 2003, is based upon 6 design principles that create schools that are centers of community:
1. The learning environment should enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners.
2. The learning environment should serve as a center of the community.

3. The learning environment should result from a planning and design process that involves all community interests.
4. The learning environment should provide for health, safety, and security.
5. The learning environment should make effective use of available resources.
6. The learning environment should be flexible and adaptable.

Schools that contain these 6 aspects are shown to improve student learning, school effectiveness, family engagement, and community vitality. In addition to several urban, suburban, and rural examples of these best practices, this planning guide includes a step-by-step plan for starting this siting process within a school district. This is a very thorough checklist that is sensitive to the time constraints, policies, and politics that school districts face. This includes determining stakeholders, involving parents, senior centers, incorporating different belief system, working with state regulations, and many other tricky situations. This guide hits at the intersection of educating and urban planning by describing why school siting is not only important to the community for convenience, health, and safety, but also for academic reasons.

<u>Use for Districts</u>
This guide states it clearly, "Challenging as the situation appears, there is a brighter side. The pressing need to renovate, replace, and create so many new educational facilities at once presents a compelling opportunity to evaluate existing research about what constitutes an optimal learning environment." Research from other articles and guides in this report is showing us what an optimal learning environment is, and the very detailed steps laid out in this guide give school districts a pathway for creating change in the way they site schools. For many districts, locating for sustainability or health may not be of primary concern, and therefore can easily fall off the table for consideration. Using this guide, school districts that may not have taken urban planning tools into consideration before can find a way to organize themselves internally and the community externally to create a plan for siting schools to be centers of communities.

Model School Siting Policy for School Districts: National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity

<u>Summary</u>
This policy package is a set of recommendations for schools that emphasizes successful siting through a holistic lens of student achievement, student health, and community wellness. This report is a resource for school districts. Any school district that sees schools as a part of a community and envisions educating the whole child to raise achievement can use these guidelines to understand how, from an urban planning standpoint, they can increase achievement. It also provides ways for individual school

districts to fit its recommendations to their specific needs and standards. It is a starting point for school districts looking at prioritizing intentional school siting, and includes comments that can help school districts with unique situations to understand how these policies may turn out looking once implemented, and whether or not to make an exception when implementing them.

<u>Use for Districts</u>
This document provides a way for school districts to insert their own information and use the document as their own policy framework, adjusting it to their specific needs as they chose. As a national policy analysis, the recommendations and guidelines provided are based on national-scale evidence of what makes a school site beneficial to the entire community. The 8 aspects included in this document that a school district can chose to implement into their own policy to achieve this are:

1. Collaborative Planning
2. Long-Term Data-Driven Planning
3. Account for All Costs
4. Co-Location and Shared Use
5. Preference for Renovation
6. Diverse, Walkable Schools through School Siting and Assignment Policies
7. Equity in School Facilities
8. Health Impacts
9. Safe Routes to Schools
10. Safe Infrastructure for Walking, Bicycling, and Public Transportation in School Vicinity

School Siting in Suburban Areas: A Case Study of Maryland and Northern Virginia by Noreen C McDonald

<u>Summary</u>
The paper uses the demographically and economically similar suburban counties of Washington, DC in both Maryland and Virginia to examine how state planning policies affect school siting. The study finds that although neither state requires schools to build within an urban growth area, Maryland's use of Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances as opposed to Virginia's pro-growth policies brings school planners and county planners into a closer working relationship. This close relationship in turn makes it more likely that schools are sited within urban growth areas and in accordance with local comprehensive plans. Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances, or APFOs, are policies that can put moratoriums on proposed developments if they would put undue strain on public utilities like roads and water. Virginia's pro-growth attitude, on the other hand, can

be exemplified by a state law saying that localities cannot require developers to pay fees to offset the public costs of their projects.

<u>Use for Districts</u>
The author proposes reasons why school planners choose tend to choose large sites and policy options that could encourage smaller school sites. Many of the policy options are legislative, so offer little use for King County's immediate problems, but could be taken into consideration by the county for future changes to school siting policy. The rationale for large school sites is primarily risk. The school district takes on little risk when acquiring extra land, but large risks when not acquiring enough.
These risks come from a need to provide space in case of population growth in the future, possible increases in land costs, construction contingencies, and a public desire for schools to satisfy the community's needs for recreational facilities.

This case study provides the following policy options to encourage smaller school sites:

1. State maximum acreage standards in addition to minimums.
2. Incentive-based policies like Massachusetts Smart Growth School Cost Reimbursement, which could provide a model for reimbursing school districts for capital costs only if the new school integrates into the community.
3. Educating county planning commissions and developers on the benefits of better integrated sites.
4. Combining public and school facilities, ie. combining the school and local library as one or siting a school near recreational facilities so that the school can use them.

Planning for Schools and Livable Communities: the Oregon School Siting Handbook

<u>Summary</u>
Oregon's handbook for school siting is a comprehensive and useful toolkit written for all stakeholders in the school siting process. The handbook highlights challenges to smart-growth school siting practices, recommends characteristics of a well-sited school and ways to achieve those features, and suggests ways to coordinate stakeholders in the school-siting process.

<u>Use for Districts</u>
This handbook offers multiple ways school districts can achieve well-sited schools:
1. Districts should be communicative about their facility needs with the county to streamline the zoning process.

2. Go the extra mile and involve the community in the permitting process; door-to-door canvassing, take-home surveys, community meetings, etc.
3. Create school facility plans for the next 10-20 years.
4. When using public facilities, school districts should establish mechanisms for cooperative agreements that facilitate this shared infrastructure to reduce conflict.
5. School districts should choose sites that are safe to access via bike, walking and vehicle, and near routes that promote neighborhood connectivity.
6. Start a Safe Routes to School Program and provide walking escort programs where needed.
7. Districts should involve an architect in the process as early as siting, and should choose an architect familiar with creative school design.

The paper provided a great example of a school district and city that worked together to find a more appropriate and sustainable urban site for their new school through collaboration. This paper speaks of Eugene and the Bethel School District, "What began as a relationship lacking communication and coordination ended up as a coordinated partnership united by a common goal: community development."

EPA School Siting Guidelines

Summary
The EPA has created voluntary school siting guidelines for school districts and community members when considering environmental and public health risks when siting schools. The EPA issued in response to the 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act, Section 502, which the EPA to develop guidelines that take into account transportation, children's risk when exposed to pollution and hazardous substances, energy efficiency and the potential use of a school as emergency shelter.

Use for Districts
The EPA lists the following desirable attributes of candidate locations for school sites. Complying with voluntary EPA standards puts school districts ahead of the curve in the drive for sustainable school models and attracts students and families to the district. The EPA recommends:
1. Walkable community facilities nearby, about ½ a mile.
2. Located within the "attendance boundary," or in the area in which most students live.
3. In a location with previously established infrastructure, like roads and traffic lights.
4. With the ability to tap into public water supply, rather than building a well or septic system.

5. Neighborhood access and connectivity – around sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit stops.
6. Sensitive land preservation – "avoid siting new schools on or in close proximity to existing sensitive land uses," (EPA 45).

Linking School Construction Investments to Equity, Smart Growth, and Healthy Communities by Jeffrey M Vincent and Mary W Filardo

Summary
The paper notes the rapid growth in public school construction from 1995 to 2004. Using the cases of Florida and California, the paper shows that disinvestment in school buildings in lower income and minority urban areas is driving families away from core urban or suburban areas in search of better schools. The paper also implicates school consolidation, siting and construction decisions in making, "children walking to school as the exception, rather than the rule," (Vincent and Filardo 23).

Use for Districts
The paper sees publicly accessible information on the physical condition and facility spending of schools as key to effecting equitable and smart-growth school siting because school districts do not currently have any way prioritizing schools or areas with greatest construction needs. The paper also echoes the other literature by calling for investment to maintain or construct new schools in existing neighborhoods.

Smart Growth Schools Report Card

Summary
This report card, produced by Nathan Norris, Director of Implementation Advisory for PlaceMakers, LLC, is compilation of best practices taken from school siting and smart-growth literature into 11 criteria.

Use for Districts
The criteria are extremely useful when thinking about the case of King County public schools because they list specific actions that can be taken to achieve community development, environmental sustainability and other attributes. The report card also lists hurdles to each of the called-for criteria, which could be useful for school districts when planning how to implement smart-growth school siting. These include costs, time, and a lack of trained planners.

Edge-ucation: What Compels Communities to Build Schools in the Middle of Nowhere?

Summary

The paper examines why school districts choose to build schools on the edge of towns. It details the history of 20th century school siting attitudes, including Henry Linn's influential percentage rule that stated that any school renovation that costing 50% or more of the cost of building a new school wasn't worth it and was used as a guiding principle for school districts until the start of the new millennium. At this time, a report entitled "Why Johnny Can't Walk to School," began to catalyze planners and community members to call for locally-sited schools. The author also points to a lack of esteem for historic or aesthetically appealing schools and the move to larger schools as motivators for far out buildings.

Use for Districts

The paper mentions the renovation of Lewis and Clark High School in downtown Spokane as a huge success. The school district bought up the entire block next to the high school to make room for expansion. The school has rejuvenated its struggling neighborhood, and the school's population size has grown since it opened, with students from other areas even opting to go there instead of their local school. Perhaps Spokane then, could serve as role model for Issaquah and Redmond.

Hard Lessons: Causes and Consequences of Michigan's School Construction Boom

Summary

The paper outlines the negative effects of siting schools on the boundaries in Michigan, emphasizing how this practice has caused Michigan to become one of the fastest sprawling states in the nation and has dramatically raised property taxes and related debt. The paper ends with ten recommendations for the State Superintendent and Legislature.

Use for Districts

The report introduces the idea that siting new schools on the edges of urban and suburban areas results in boom-and-bust cycles in school enrollment. These cycles in turn make future enrollment planning difficult and make future school construction projects risky.The report also claims that, "New school construction is dramatically raising property taxes for Michigan homeowners and businesses and has tripled related debt from $4billion to $12 billion since 1994," which demonstrates the dire

consequences far-out school siting can have on the economic vitality of the area and state (McClelland and Scheider 3).

Development of Student Transportation Funding Methodology for the State of Washington Office of Financial Management

Summary
This document is a report done by Management Partnership Services for the State of Washington to analyze the current methodology behind funding of student transportation. Currently, the methodology allows for schools to use large amounts of funding to transport students farther with no repercussions. This policy does not discourage, but permits the siting of schools outside of urban areas. Because student transportation is a part of basic education, the state id required to fully fund it.

In their new methodology, the State of Washington will be offering incentives for school districts that prioritize efficiency in their transportation plans. This will be an important step in creating more environmentally friendly school siting policies and will encourage schools to site in urban areas.

Use for Districts
School Districts can benefit from understanding in advance how the new transportation funding allocation system will work. In preparation for this new policy, schools should plan their school sites and transportation plans accordingly so that they can profit from their existing system rather than having to change it to gain these incentives from the state.

RCWs and WACs

WAC 392-342-020: Site Review and Evaluation

The superintendent of public instruction together with the school district shall conduct a review and evaluation of sites for new and existing state funding assisted projects. In selecting sites for schools, a district shall consider the following:
1. The property upon which the school facility is or will be located is free of all encumbrances that would detrimentally interfere with the construction, operation, and useful life of the facility;
2. The site is of sufficient size to meet the needs of the facility. The minimum acreage of the site should be five usable acres and one additional usable acre for each one hundred students or portion thereof of projected maximum enrollment plus an additional five usable acres if the school contains any grade above grade six.

A district considering the use of a site that is less than the recommended minimum usable acreage should assure that:
1. The health and safety of the students will not be in jeopardy;
2. The internal spaces within the proposed facility will be adequate for the proposed educational program;
3. The neighborhood in which the school facility is or will be situated will not be detrimentally impacted by lack of parking for students, employees, and the public; and
4. The physical education and recreational program requirements will be met.
5. A site review or predesign conference has been conducted with all appropriate local code agencies in order to determine design constraints;
6. A geotechnical engineer has conducted a limited subsurface investigation to gather basic information regarding potential foundation and subgrade performance.

WAC 392-342-020 and King County

The language of this WAC allows for schools to be sited in urban areas that are smaller than the state guidelines call for. School districts that are currently building on urban or suburban land because of site size requirements would benefit from knowing that a smaller site size is acceptable as long as these general guidelines are followed after a site analysis. Many urban high schools are built on small lots, notably Roosevelt High School in Seattle, which is 7 acres and passed through this site review. This allows school districts to be more creative and innovating in their site planning than when

having to follow the specific lot sizes listed under (2), possibly co-siting and sharing community facilities or locating near other community resources, rather than out on large rural lots for their size.

Case Study: Renton High School

Photo: Northwest Architectural Coalition

Renton High School was renovated in 1998 using funds approved by a voter levy. Renton High school is sited in an urban area and includes several shared-use facilities and co-sites with other local facilities for certain sports. In addition, in 2003 the construction of a community performing arts center was completed, with most funding provided by IKEA. Several community businesses as well as the City of Renton contributed to the cost of building this facility.

Renton High School was remodelled with sustainability in mind. The Renton Community and the school district came together to create a school that had the best environment for student learning in mind. They used recycled materials in the new construction and included more natural light to cut down on energy use while providing a more natural environment for students. In addition, the overall goal was to make the school's physical footprint smaller and more compact. The school now takes up 26 acres including the shared use facilities.

Figure 1 shows Renton High School's location. Noteworthy is the fact that the school is located nearby a shopping center, a public library, a history museum, ballfields, and churches. The central location of Renton High School improves its walkability and allows for it to have a smaller parking lot and thus a less sprawling campus.
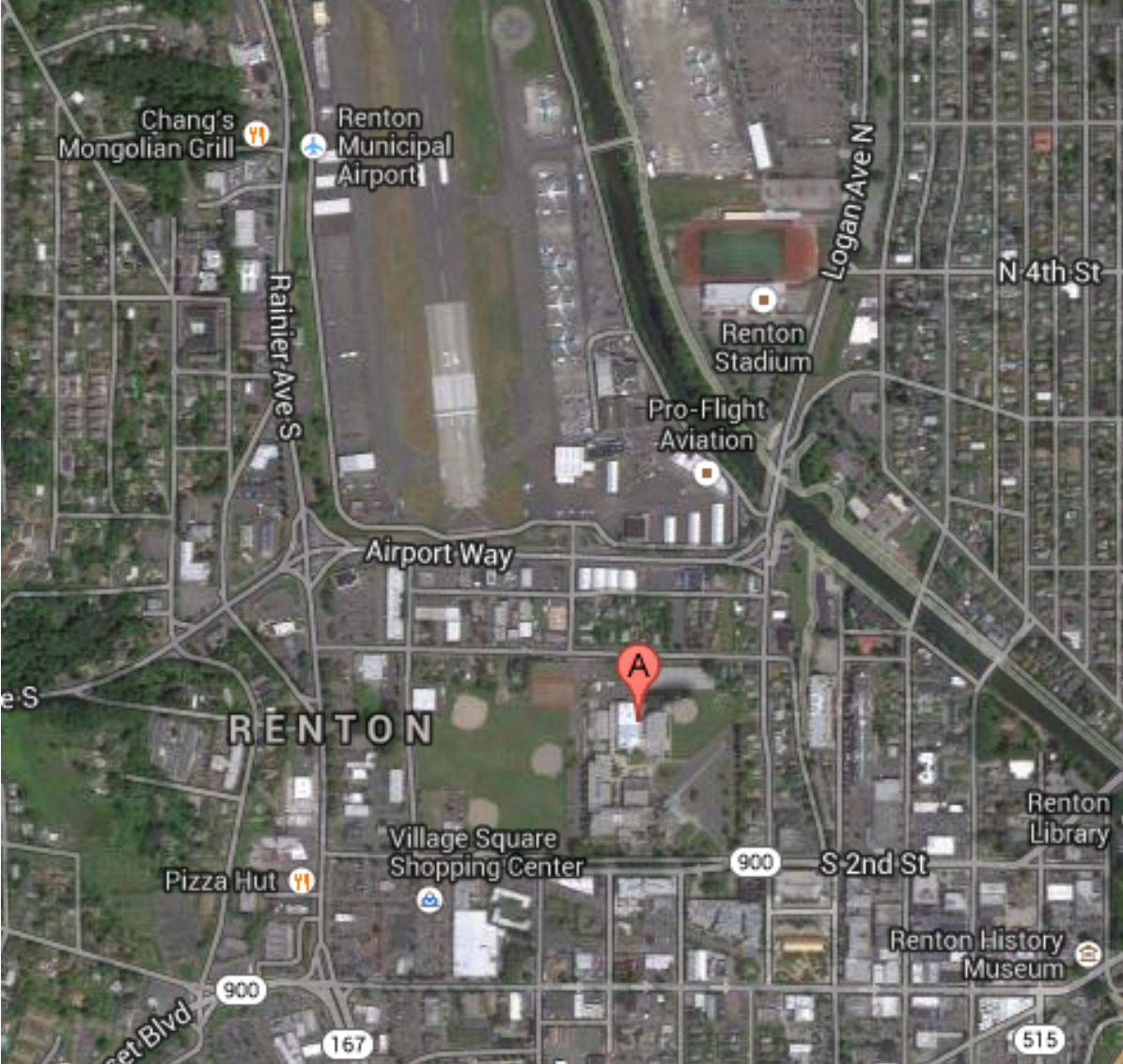
Figure 1.

Image: Google Maps

Memo to King County School Districts: Introduction

Our team suggests creating open dialogue between the county, city, and school districts. This report is designed to help school districts to understand the benefits of using best practices for school development and siting in accordance with the Washington State Growth Management Act and Urban Growth Boundaries. Our research shows that when local government and school districts work together and involve the local community in school development and siting decisions, schools become the most sustainable and are utilized by the entire community.

This memo is for use by King County to inform school districts of the problem of school siting outside of the UGA and offer suggestions, incentives, and partnered solutions for creating positive change in the way that schools are sited in King County. We have offered both school districts and King County many ways to improve school siting, and open communication and collaboration from different parties is essential to creating intentionally sited schools in the communities of King County.

Memo to King County School Districts

To: Superintendent Dorn and Representative of King County School Districts
From: Lydia Claxton, Kate Walford, and Margaret Shaw, Student Consultants to King County from the University of Washington
Date: Wednesday, December 4, 2013

Overarching Problems

I. Discrepancies between Proposed School Sites and the Goals of the Growth Management Act: A number of King County school districts have proposed future school sites outside Urban Growth Areas as designated in the 2012 GMA. The costs of this planning disparity between King County and school districts are many, including potential negation of local comprehensive planning goals, cost, and environmental and community degradation.

II. Lack of Incentives and Support for Sustainable, Community-Oriented School Siting: Transportation funding allocation methodology allows for schools to incur high energy and cost expenditures to the state by siting schools far from urban centers. Schools take on economic risk and public scrutiny when building on smaller plots.

Background

The Washington State Growth Management Act regulate development within the state in order to preserve natural resources and rural land. The GMA restricts development to inside of the Urban Growth Boundary. The GMA has historically not required accountability from school districts, which has resulted in districts building school facilities outside of the UGA.

Proposed Solutions

School districts should work to overcome these problems by considering the following recommendations:

1. Prioritize Community Development in School Siting
   ● Involve the community and stakeholders in conversations about school siting
   ● Site schools in urban areas for increased community involvement

2. Consider Sharing Facilities or Co-Siting Schools
   ● Sharing facilities with other local institutions and community groups reduces overall costs and builds community

3. Design with an Emphasis on Walkability and Connectivity

- Walkable schools increase student health, safety, social capital, and academic outcomes

4. Site with Consideration for Local Environmental Impact
  - Avoid siting on or near rural or environmentally sensitive areas

5. Assess Long-Term Costs to District and State
  - Maintenance of large facilities and long transportation routes can incur large costs to the district and state over a period of time

Potential Benefits
- Economically and socially-vibrant communities
- Healthy students and families
- Environmental sustainability and conservation of local environments
- Reduced long-term cost to district, taxpayer, and state
- Improved academic outcomes
- Lasting partnerships between districts and local government

Conclusion:

School districts can use these solutions to reduce contentions and improve relationships with local governments. Following these recommendations will also prepare school districts for policy changes that may incentivize energy efficiency in school and transportation planning. Schools that are sited with population growth, community stakeholders, and the local environment in mind better serve students and have better academic and social outcomes.

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