

Building New Schools – The Quest for Suitable Land

When residents of the Issaquah School District approved our 2016 school bond, they recognized that we are facing an immediate need to increase classroom space to accommodate growing enrollment in our District. The bond authorized the ISD to acquire property, build new schools, and expand existing schools to meet our current needs as well projected enrollment needs for the next five to ten years.

ISD has been working diligently to find suitable properties for our new schools within the Urban Growth Boundary. In the process, important issues facing our communities have surfaced, including the impact of growth, traffic, and a desire to preserve our natural resources. While the future growth of our community is an important topic for all citizens to engage in, whether or not steps are taken to slow future development, classroom space and new schools are needed now and will be in the foreseeable future.

We understand it can be frustrating to our community that we do not talk publicly about property we are evaluating until we are in the process of recommending purchase to the school board. This is because we are in competition with major developers for open land and when we express interest publicly, the price of the land tends to increase. That said, the ISD has identified and recommended several sites suitable for building schools per the 2016 school bond. We would like to thank Highlands Connection Magazine for this opportunity share with you some of our criteria for siting these schools.

1. **Size, Geography, and Location** - We are building multistory urban style schools that require less land and favor walking over other modes of transportation. However, we still need enough usable land for playing fields, parking, and busing. We also favor locations that will do the most to relieve overcrowding or accommodate future growth.
2. **Is the Land Available for Purchase?** The ISD and other public agencies may exercise what is called the right of eminent domain, which allows a government or its agent, with payment of compensation, to appropriate private property for public use. However, we view this as a last resort when we conclude that we have no other viable option. Further, eminent domain actions often result in a lengthy legal process that could take years to resolve. This not only delays the building of a needed school, but also increases the cost to build it.
3. **Transportation.** When we assess a piece of property we need to consider how it impacts traffic in the neighborhood and whether or not we can run our school buses on efficient routes.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge that all of us have had the experience of driving by a property that once was a stand of trees that has been cleared for development. It is unsettling to us too. However, the Growth Management Act has created a definitive boundary within which residential and commercial development can occur. This preserves our forests and protects our hillsides so that we, and future generations, can enjoy them.

As stewards of your tax dollars, entrusted with the mission of providing a high quality education to the children living in our district, we work diligently to find properties suitable for new school construction. To learn more about the 2016 School Bond and all of our construction projects, please visit our website at

<https://www.issaquah.wednet.edu/district/departments/CapProjects>.