

Ron Thiele, Superintendent

November 1, 2019

Members, City Council
City of Issaquah
P.O. Box 1307
Issaquah, WA 98027
citycouncil@issaquahwa.gov

**Re: Issaquah School District - New School District Properties
Proposed Redesignation and Rezone**

Dear Members of the City Council:

The Issaquah School District submits these comments regarding the City's proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map (the "CF Redesignations and Rezones") as a supplement to written comments submitted to you, by our Board of Directors and to the Planning Policy Commission on October 9, 2019 by the District's legal counsel. As should be clear from our collective comments, we need the Council's support, consistent with the City's existing regulatory framework, in order to fulfill our shared obligation to plan for needed schools.

The City and the District have worked together for several years to anticipate and plan, consistent with the directives in the Countywide Planning Policies and the City's Comprehensive Plan, for the new schools needed in our community. We appreciate that the City's Comprehensive Plan and Municipal Code policies establish and direct publicly owned properties like ours to a separate zoning category, the CF zone. As you know, the City's work in 2017 and 2018 resulted in amendments to City land use regulations to facilitate development of schools under the Community Facilities – Facilities zoning standards. The process included considerable public review and lengthy deliberation and important conversation regarding the challenges of finding urban land for schools. The resulting amendments reflect a compromise allowing construction of public schools efficiently throughout the City while providing standards to ensure compatibility with neighboring properties. We now need to move forward within your adopted framework.

Our work to find school sites has been extensive and exhausting. As you know, King County policy prohibits schools outside of the urban growth boundary (see attached map of the District with Urban Growth Area shaded). There is simply very little developable land within the urban area and even less contiguous developable land in areas where our students live. We searched for more than six years for school sites, working with a professional broker, and have reviewed over 700 acres of potential sites within the urban area of our District. We engaged in eminent domain, competed with developers, and approached school siting in a creative manner (including using smaller footprints), consistent with the City's adopted policies, to secure properties for the four new schools approved by our voters in the 2016 Bond. We do not have other properties that we can look to as a back-up plan for our community's schools. At the same time, we feel that the acquired

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school sites will best serve our community by allowing us to plan for schools in the areas of the District where they are needed most.

Our community has no other option but to build a new high school. I need to reiterate; we have no option beyond the Plateau Campus Property to use for a high school. We are running out of room in our existing spaces, have limited options for adding capacity at our existing high schools, and yet continue to grow in student population. If we do not provide new capacity at the 9-12 level by 2025, we will have more than 1,000 high school students without seats in our schools. This will be an infrastructure failure and will compromise our students' educational experience. We collectively need to work together to avoid this result.

Importantly, we have no intent to overlook the concerns of our neighbors in this process. As Superintendent, I reached out in 2016 to the Providence Point community when the District first started considering the former Plateau Campus property to site a future new high school and a new elementary school. At that time, the property was under contract with a private developer for a plat to develop nearly 140 new single family homes. We met with residents on at least three different occasions as early outreach. In those conversations, residents seemed receptive to the concept of both schools.

In normal situations, these conversations would have continued uninterrupted as we moved forward with site acquisition and project planning. However, in this case, we were delayed by nearly three years of litigation, only recently resolved, in which we had no certainty with regard to our planning at the site. However, as with any new school project, we are committed to working with our neighbors on project planning. Our schools are an asset to the community and our neighbors are an asset to our schools.

In summary, we need the City's support to designate our school sites as Community Facilities – Facilities so that we can move forward with planning and building our schools as intended by the City's existing regulatory directives. As the District's top administrator, I do need to stress our Board's rejection of the Planning Policy Commission's recommendation to designate one of our school parcels as open space and render unusable six acres of otherwise developable public school land. The District objects unequivocally to this unsolicited attempt to downzone public school property and requests that the City do the same. We specifically request that no action be taken at all on this parcel (or any other school district parcel) if the City Council chooses not to rezone the parcel site as Community Facilities – Facilities.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and your shared interest in the siting of the schools needed to serve our community's residents. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Ron Thiele
Superintendent

Enclosure/Attachment

cc: Honorable Mary Lou Pauly, Mayor, City of Issaquah
Wally Bobkiewicz, City Administrator, City of Issaquah
Members, Issaquah School District Board of Directors
Sammamish City Council
Rick Rudometkin, City Manager, City of Sammamish

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