

The Search for Property to Site New Schools – FAQ

What is the Issaquah School District asking of the Issaquah City Council?

There are approximately 7 acres on the top of the hill just west of Swedish Hospital that would work well for an elementary school. It is a great location for a neighborhood school and likely our best hope for a new elementary school in the Highlands. The City of Issaquah staff recommended the hilltop be used for a school, the trees on the slope be saved as open space, and the base of the hill be zoned for commercial development. The trees on the slope would screen the school from views from the west and south. For all of this to work, the City of Issaquah City Council needs to approve annexation of the property which is currently in King County and also establish a zoning designation of Community Facilities or CF-F for the upper portion of the hill to allow for a new school.

We have also requested that the City Council consider revising the land use codes in the CF-F category to facilitate the siting of schools on smaller parcels with a smaller building footprint. These changes are needed so that we can be certain how much property the District needs to purchase. This change also increases our opportunities to locate schools in the neighborhoods they would serve. We also need these code changes in order to maximize use of existing school sites and to help us locate and build schools on other sites within the City of Issaquah.

What is a SEPA Review?

SEPA stands for State Environmental Policy Act Compliance. The District must complete an extensive process that identifies and analyzes environmental impacts of an action, such as constructing a school building. This review helps agencies, decision makers, and the public understand how building a school may impact the environment. For example, the health of tree stands or landslides would be a factor considered under a SEPA Review.

What is an impervious surface and how does that relate to school facilities?

Permeable surfaces, also known as pervious surfaces, allow water to percolate into the soil. **Impervious surfaces** are not permeable and do not allow water to pass through. Parking lots are an example of an impervious surface. However, when it comes to schools, it is important to understand that **play fields are considered impervious - the same as a parking lot!** That is why the District asks for code changes that allow us to have a larger percentage of what is considered an impervious surface, so that we can accommodate our play and athletic fields.

What is the difference between a “Compact School” and an “Urban School”?

The Issaquah School District has been building what we call “compact schools”, meaning that they are multistory and therefore require less land. We say they have a smaller “footprint”. Our new schools, such as Clark Elementary and Issaquah Middle School are compact, three story buildings. Other features of a compact school may include underground parking or other design elements that decrease the amount of land we need for the school. The term “Urban School” is one being talked about in cities all around the country. However, it means different things to different people and regions. It often brings with it visions of skyscraper schools with no play or athletic fields, no bus loops, or parent drop off spaces. That is not what the Issaquah School District intends to build. We want schools that are efficient and encourage walking, but we still design to allow for safe busing and student pick up and drop off.

What is the minimum amount of land we need to build a compact school and how does that relate to the land use code changes we are asking for?

How much land we will need depends on what land use codes the city adopts with regard to impervious surfaces and tree retention. A compact elementary school would need between 6.3 and 8.1 acres depending on which code amendments the City Council approves.