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Committee to back fourth elementary school

By JULIA MARTINEZ staff writer Mar 6, 2017



Cars fill the parking lot at the entrance to Mount Stuart Elementary School, Wednesday. The parking lot is next to a city-owned BMX bike park. A committee will be looking into the property situation surrounding Mount Stuart Elementary, where a grant limits what the school district can do with the land.

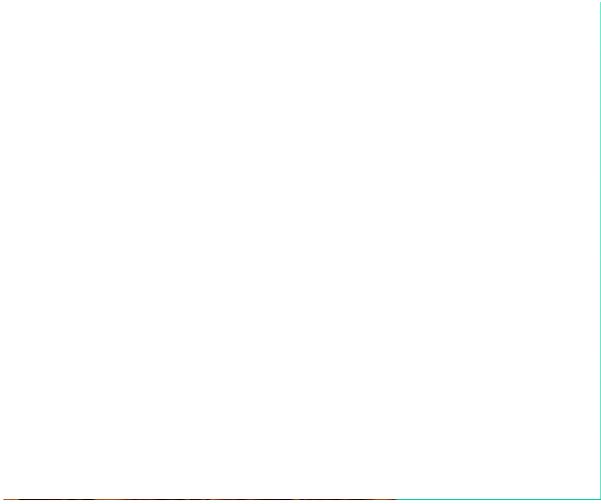
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The Community Capital Planning Committee, tasked with offering a recommendation to the Ellensburg School District school board, has voted unanimously to recommend the construction of a fourth elementary school to ease overcrowding in the district.

On Wednesday, the CCPC narrowed their focus for future meetings to formulating a timeline and plan for an elementary school bond. The final recommendation will be presented to the Ellensburg School Board. Property for the new school has not yet been selected, and an additional vote on Wednesday recommended that the future bond have a property “locked in.”

The committee will be looking into the property situation surrounding Mount Stuart Elementary School. A grant used to purchase the property in the 1960s limits what the district can do with the land.



The committee also voted to recommend that eighth-graders be moved back to Morgan Middle School as soon as the school is done with its remodeling. The eighth-graders were moved to the high school in 2012 after parts of the building were shut down because of structure concerns.

Easing the crowding

An interim solution is still in the works to relieve crowding in the elementary schools.

An idea to move some fifth-grade classes to open classrooms at Morgan Middle School was not popular with observers.

Morgan Principal Michelle Bibich asked that the committee not “shuffle the problem.”

“We’re pushing the issue of overcrowding to another location,” she said.

Middle school teacher Lori Leach said moving the fifth-graders would be the same as what was done to the eighth-graders. Fifth-graders will not be self-contained as they are at the elementary level, she said, and they will mingle with other students regardless of how creative the school gets to

try to keep the grades separated.

Amy Allen, who has children in the district, said the thought of 10-year-olds being in the same school as 13-year-olds makes her skin crawl.

“I’d homeschool (my daughter) before I’d allow that to happen,” she said.

Matt Cziske, who also has children in the district, pointed out that the committee needs to look beyond the elementary school need. If it’s a problem now at the elementary level, he said, it’ll be a problem at the middle school level, too.

Bond timing

Most committee members agreed that a bond should be introduced in 2018, but John Graf, Lincoln Elementary School principal, said that might not be a viable timeframe. More time needs to be dedicated to educating the community about the problems at the schools, he said, and land needs to be locked down.

“I think 2018 is really quick and I want the bond to pass the first time,” he said.



Jeff Slothower also voiced his concerns about a future bond’s success, saying that the district would be “rushing it.”

Others were more optimistic. Joan Wood said it’s possible to put together a plan in 11 months.

“I really think we can do it,” she said.

Carla Ketchum, Mount Stuart teacher, would like to wait.

“We need a school,” she said. “I think 2018 is too soon. We’ve got to start by making the community understand what the crowding looks like.”

School board member Curtis Bull said the “real kicker is political palatability.” A more realistic time frame, Bull said, would be 2019 but it could be sooner.

Micah Brunner would like a bond as soon as possible.

“I think that we are living in a little bit of fear from the nightmare of the middle school bond,” he said. “And I think that’s a really bad way to live.”

The next CCPC meeting is slated for March 15 at 5:30 p.m. at the Valley View Elementary cafeteria. To review committee materials, visit: <http://www.esd401.org/community/capital-planning> The school board will meet Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Ellensburg City Hall Chambers.

Julia Martinez