District Advisory Council Talking Points
May 27, 2014

School District Disciplinary Appeals Council

In the last meeting Gary asked for volunteers to be a part of a School District Disciplinary Appeals Council. He updated the group to the fact that the school board has chosen to keep the authority of overseeing disciplinary appeals, so the council will not be necessary.

2014 bond projects

Gary says the high school is on track to open during the 2015-16 school year and the middle school and elementary schools projects are scheduled to open at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year.

(1) P-Zones

After passage of the bond proposition in February, the district and city have worked together regarding zoning for all district buildings. The district asked to rezone all of the schools, not just the three projects in the bond. The city puts the application to the Mercer Island Planning Commission for a recommendation to the Mercer Island City Council. As a part of this process, the district and city had many individual and group meetings with the neighborhood residents. Thanks to meetings with the surrounding community, the district modified the IMS design to meet neighbors' interests, resulting in a reduced footprint, which also saved money. Gary says many positive things happened as a result of the meetings.

Neighbors around Lakeridge wanted protection including a guarantee of a 200' setback. The other district sites had 45' – 60' setbacks with 30' heights. The district received communication from other Mercer Island residents who did not want the district's hands to be tied to a 200' setback requirement in the future and thought that it was wrong to have such disparate setbacks at each school. At the May 19 City Council meeting, Gary asked the council to remand the Lakeridge site rezoning back to the Planning Commission for additional review regarding the setback. On June 2, the City Council will have a second reading of all rezoning except for Lakeridge. In remanding the zoning decision back to the Planning Commission, the City Council asked that the setbacks have conformity with the other school sites.

(2) High school variance

The district opted to ask for a variance from the current residential code rather than wait for City Council to approve a new P-zone at the high school. This was by design in order to get a jump start on bids and construction. Current rules require a 45' setback from the street and the high school requested a variance of 25'. The hearing examiner supported the variance, as did the Mercer Island City Council.

(3) $50 million bond sale and "Aaa" rating

Gary says the school board authorized the sale of $50 million in bonds. The district has a "Aaa" bond rating, which was attractive to many buyers who wanted "Aaa" bond ratings in their portfolios. The district sold $50 million of its $98.8M authority, and the net interest rate is less than three percent, which is impressive. In the 1990s, the interest rate on servicing those bonds was at about six percent. The MISD is one of only 65 school districts throughout the country with a "Aaa" rating.

Community Task Force on Youth Concerns

Cindy provided the update that during a joint City Council/School District meeting discussed local conditions and root causes of negative behavior and addressing youth wellness rather than tackling individual behaviors. Denette Glassy will serve as a champion for this task force. She identified the types of people and skills desired for the task force, including six to eight members with skills in reading and synthesizing research and expertise in pediatrics, public health, epidemiology, developmental psychology, behavioral health, educations and chemical dependency.

Elimination of Culminating Project

Gary says the culminating project was originally envisioned as an exhibition of a long-term project by students. The project has become more of a series of hoops to jump through. The board recently removed the culminating project as a graduation requirement at Gary's recommendation.

Different Learners Review and Curriculum Adoption

Jennifer says this year we are building a K-2 curriculum for students who require differentiated instructional materials and strategies in reading in the primary (K-2) grades. The district is adopting a supplemental program called "Wired for Reading" to help provide additional support to students who may not be meeting standards. There is also a tool for identifying issues early for all students. Next year the district will work on a grade 3-5 reading curriculum as well. At the high school, you look at risk indicators such as attendance and path toward graduation, which will then be pushed down to the middle school level.

Diversity Committee / Panel

Gary says we have an adaptive opportunity to work with staff with the increasing diversity of the student body and Mercer Island community. Our student community looks a lot different than it did five years ago. This committee is being appointed to look at the growing ethnic diversity of our community and how we are communicating with students of diverse backgrounds. We do not have an issue of certain populations achieving scholastically, but we do have an issue with populations being disciplined at different proportions. We also want to answer questions of how welcome families with different ethnic backgrounds feel and how engaged in the community they feel. With this group, we are attempting to break down some barriers and have courageous conversations.

2014 Audit Exit Conference May 20, 2014 – Clean Audit

Future meetings of the DAC

Gary asks members to make sure they have replacements from their constituent groups if they are rotating off of the council. First meeting of 2014-15 school year:

Wednesday, October 1, 9:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Mercer Island School District Board Room

Gary adjourns the meeting at 2:43 p.m.