



Brooks and Associates

Civil Engineering - Marketing - Technical Support

MEMORANDUM

TO: File
FROM: Kathy Burgess
SUBJECT: New South Anchorage Conceptual Design
Building Design Committee Meetings
September 17-18, 1999
DATE: September 20, 1999

September 17, 1999

Terry Hyer of ECI/Hyer opened the meeting by welcoming all those present and introducing the members of the project team. The Building Committee is part of the design team and the project team is here to facilitate and listen to the committee's ideas.

Pat McDowell, head of Secondary Education for the Anchorage School District, gave a brief description of the background and purpose of the Secondary Educational Specifications developed by the District and adopted by the School Board to guide the development and renovation of high schools.

Gaylaird Christopher of Perkins & Will introduced his presentation by saying that designing a high school is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—for most architects, for school staff, parents, and community members who participate in a design committee. The decisions made here will last the lifetime of the school—50 to 100 years—and will affect thousands of young people who pass through the school.

There followed the Perkins & Will presentation “Planning and Designing High Schools for the 21st Century”.

A participant asked how our Alaska climate affects school design. It has dramatic influence. In warmer climates there is more opportunity for making the outdoors an integrated part of the facility. In Alaska this is curtailed and there is an even higher value on views and the availability of natural daylight.

Gaylaird then asked those present to state briefly their vision for the new school. The following are some of the comments of participants:

- It should be community-friendly. The community should be a part of the school and should always feel welcome there. It should reflect the diversity and the environment of Anchorage.
- There should be a way to have a part of the building open to the public when the rest of it is closed.
- There should be space in the building for students to work outside the classroom.

- I'm concerned about how this big building will fit in to a rural neighborhood and what its exterior appearance will be. I hope it can be built without completely taking the forest down.
- The development of the Anchorage area has come from technical industries. It would be great if the school's design could celebrate that.
- This part of town is very car-oriented. It would be nice if the school building could alleviate the need for some of that car use by having facilities local people could use—a community center, child care, or library, for example.
- The school should have a “small school feel” so that the kids feel part of a community. The team model has worked well for the middle schools and maybe something similar could be applied here.
- Resources have to be equal between the schools of Anchorage. It isn't fair if one is special.
- It should be built of durable materials. There should be no secluded areas that can't be supervised, yet not completely open-plan.
- There should be attention to details that might cause problems. For example, at Goldenview Middle School an arm-high planter was topped with pea gravel. It didn't take long for all the gravel to be taken out of the planter and thrown elsewhere.
- There should be areas for the students to develop and change for themselves. It would help them claim ownership of the school.
- Flexibility is important to enable the building to remain useful and accommodate change during its lifetime.
- The school will be some distance from a business area or mall. It should include enough amenities to make students happy to stay there all day.
- No open breezeways!

September 18, 1999

Terry Hyer welcomed all those attending and there followed a round of self-introductions of participants.

Pat McDowell reviewed the history and goals of the Education Specifications.

Esther Cox, Anchorage School District Project Coordinator for the New South Anchorage Area High School presented the background of the new ideas for high schools that were published as Breaking Ranks by the National Association of American Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Institute.

In the 1980's the education community began to realize that this country did not have a cogent philosophy for high school education. Anchorage educators participated in “How Fares the Ninth Grade?”, a shadow study of the school day of average ninth grade students around the country. From this study came the realization that the same subjects

have been taught the same way in high schools for several generations. “If Rip van Winkle awoke today, the only institution he would recognize is school”.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals then partnered with the Carnegie Institute to create Breaking Ranks, the seminal work in the growth of a new crop of ideas about high school—personalization of school, subdivision into units of less than 500 students, multidisciplinary team teaching, community involvement, and flexible scheduling, to name a few.

Amy Yurko of Perkins & Will gave a presentation “High School Planning—A Spectrum of Approaches”

The Committee was then divided into a number of small groups. Each individual was to write a scenario for “A Day in the Life of a New South Anchorage Area High School Student”. These were then discussed within the small group, consolidated into a group list, and each group presented its ideas to the entire assembly. A sampling of these follows:

- A student might arrive early, dropped off by a parent en route to work
- Students might arrive by various forms of transportation—on foot, by bicycle, car, public bus, school bus.
- Students might want to socialize with their friends before school or to have a quieter place to finish homework or consult with others on a group project.
- Some students might want the chance to eat breakfast at school.
- Because we’re starting with a blank page here, we might propose something totally new for school transportation. Perhaps we could have a park-and-ride school with students shuttled from outlying parking centers. It would save some acreage from being paved for parking lots and lighten traffic in the immediate school area.
- Staggered starting times for classes might even out the morning traffic rush and allow students to build schedules that best suit them. For instance, one may want to start early and finish early in order to be available for a part-time job.
- It would be good to have some kind of a transition zone around the entrance to the school where kids could do some socializing and get ready for the school day.
- It would be great if students could have a mixture of individual and group learning.
- Group areas scattered around the building would allow kids to socialize near their classrooms and lockers or work on homework or activities.
- The food service at the school should be like a food court or whatever form it would take to keep the kids on campus during lunchtime. The food should be things that teenagers like to eat.
- Mirror Lake Middle School has a great cafeteria-auditorium combination that might be a model for the new school.
- An extended or flexible schedule might take the school day into a 6th or 7th hour.

- It might be a good idea to have some kind of food service available late in the day or even after hours for school events.

Gaylaird Christopher facilitated a full-group discussion on “Education & Community: Roles and Expectations.” The following are points raised in that session:

- Anchorage has a large amount of natural resource-based industry—oil, fishing, mining, ground and air transportation. These could tie in with the school.
- If we want industry’s participation in the school, we need to be able to tell them how they can help.
- Government agencies and industry could help with the development process of the school, both with ideas and with grants for special features.
- Natural resources might be a theme for the entire school or a focus of the studies of a part of it.
- There are already school-business partners who would be interested in this school design process—they should be involved.
- There will be site environmental issues. Ongoing monitoring could be tied in with classroom learning.
- Providence Hospital might like to have local clinic space within the facility.
- The University of Alaska Anchorage is another desirable partner for the school. Perhaps college courses could be taught in the building.
- The business-school coordinator at ASD should begin dialogue about the new school.
- There should be municipality participation in the school. For instance, police outreach could be located in the school.
- Public transit should be involved.
- The Coordinating Committee would be a good avenue for making these connections.
- Should there be a pool at this high school? The pools are now located at high schools but run by the municipality.

The full group was divided into its small groups again for discussion of “What’s Right for SAAHS”. The groups were asked to consider several program delivery options and decide which one they thought best for the new school. According to the mandate of the District Educational Specifications, the new building must be able to accommodate five options:

1. **Departmental**—The most frequently seen current model. Classrooms and staff clustered by curriculum subject. All science classes together, foreign languages, mathematics, etc.
2. **Grade Level House 9, 10, 11, 12**—The school is divided into four areas, one for each grade level.
3. **School-Within-A-School (9-12)**—The school contains multiple 9-12 units with separate governing bodies.

4. **School-Within-A-School (Thematic or Magnet School)**—Smaller subgroups within the school have a thematic approach which includes the basics plus emphasis on a specific area.
5. **9-10; 11-12 School**—Ninth and tenth graders are grouped together; eleventh and twelfth graders are together. This enables the younger students to focus on the core curriculum and the upper grades to go into more specialized academic programs. Common facilities are shared by all.

The option most favored by many was a hybrid of the stated forms. It would be 9th grade pods of about 100 students (four in a class of 400) that continue to focus on the basic core academics as in middle school. The rest of the school would be in pods or houses of mixed 10th-12th grades. These subgroups might be clustered somehow and each would have its own distributed administration, counselor, and security. Some of the points raised in the discussion follow:

- There is strength in integrating the older kids with the younger ones.
- Some of the groups should have a thematic or career orientation. Kids do better in a thematic arena that interests them.
- Science is the important hinge for whether a school has departments or houses. Many subjects can use basic classrooms, but the specialized facilities needed for science labs fixes them to their designated rooms.
- Perhaps one of these options favors social success more than the others. That is an important factor to consider.
- The type of instructor is important for the success of any of these organization schemes. Students tend to follow charismatic teachers into whatever type of program they are enthusiastic about teaching.
- Ninth grade is a transition year. It would be good to be somewhat separate and ease into high school life.
- One flaw in departmental organization is that students have no particular home base as they do in the various house or subgroup options.

Amy Yurko led a full-group discussion of general preferences for priorities to allocate square feet to non-basic areas from the limits given in the ed spec. No clear pattern of preference emerged. This question will need to be revisited at future meetings as the design develops.

Terry Hyer closed the meeting by thanking all who attended. The next meeting will begin the conceptual design. The architects will return with rough block sketches of how the functions and parts of the school might relate and the committee will begin working toward the idea of a building. The date of the meeting has not yet been set, but will be in about 3 weeks' time. Members of the committee will be notified of the specific time and place as soon as it is known.

Memorandum

July 10, 1999

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ATTENDEES:

Ray Amsden, ASD Facilities

Rob Balivet, ASD Facilities

Anne Brooks, Brooks & Associates

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Janet Christensen, Chugiak High School

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Greg Frosberg, ECI/Hyer

Pat Hackley, Huffman/O'Malley CC

Sheila Judge Hall, Steller Secondary School

Liz Hudson, Service Community School

Terry Hyer, ECI/Hyer

Jeff Jessee, Bowman PTA

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Jesse Martin, parent

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