

May 22, 2023

Appeal for Further Consideration/ Modification of Plans for the Expansion of Alki Elementary School.

I am appalled to the point of disbelief at the neglect of consideration for the neighborhood surrounding Alki Elementary School in the new plans for its apparently unnecessary expansion. First of all—why is this needed? The enrollment of the school has been decreasing and there is no evidence that a lot more people with children will be moving into the area. In fact, the recent murder in Whale Tail Park at the end of the playfield next to the school will probably deter young parents from settling in the area, if the ones fleeing from the crime scene with their children in strollers are any indication.

My main concerns, however, are centered around lack of proper planning for parking and traffic – the issuance of variances/departures which are based on a flawed traffic survey taken at a time of year when the playfield and adjoining beach areas were hardly in use (and when COVID and bridge closures meant that, even for the winter months, traffic in the area was nearly non-existent.) Fifty-ninth Ave. is supposed to be a major access route for emergency vehicles. Anytime the sun is out (not just on the weekends, although it is at its worst then), 59th and all the streets surrounding the playfield and for several blocks around that, are packed with parked cars and cars cruising around looking for parking. On the occasion of the shooting and murder last weekend – the first really warm, sunny day of the season – so many cars were illegally parked on BOTH sides of 59th that it was impossible for emergency vehicles to access the crime scene. It took hours for the area to be cleared out of cars. An expansion of the school size accompanied by a removal of all staff parking will mean there is nowhere for waiting parents to queue except illegally jamming up all the surrounding streets and curbs in a manner equivalent to the chaos last weekend.

At present, at the start and ending of the school day, so many parents come to pick up or drop off their children that there is double, illegal parking up and down 59th St., and surrounding streets are barely passable for at least an hour twice a day. There is only a very narrow one-lane passage by the parked bus, which contributes to the lack of access and egress. I am surprised that no child has been injured in the chaos. I can hardly imagine what will happen with MORE students AND no parking for teachers and staff (and that is a whole issue in itself—the disrespect shown for those who work at Alki is shameful). There are simply NOT 25 to 30, much less 65 or 70 spaces available within easy walking distance of the school. Lack of on-site parking for staff and teachers will result in no parking for residents, for those using the playfield, or for the dozens if not hundreds of people searching for access to Alki Beach. (People do not just come to Alki on weekends; if it is warm and sunny, there can be crowds on any day—at least enough to need substantial parking). If my own experience as a teacher is any index, teachers often arrive quite a bit before school starts, stay for an hour or more after school ends, and often have to carry loads of class materials to and from their cars. They will not only have to fight local residents for parking spaces, but also will jam up access to the playfield and to the wading trails in Schmitz reserve.

And then there is the ADA variance. How many students needing ADA access to the school will there be with the increased enrollment? I hear there are plans for two new ADA classrooms. How are these students supposed to access these classrooms? Where are their caretakers supposed to pick them up and drop them off with all available parking taken up by residents and staff and no place for parents to queue except on the curbs adjoining the playfield? What about staff and teachers? Isn't it illegal for there to be no ADA parking for employees? "Sorry we can't hire you because you have to be able to walk at least two to three blocks in order to get to the school" is not a legal job requirement. What happens when a teacher breaks his or her foot and there is no place for them to park? Are they supposed to hop through the rain trying to keep their boot dry?

And then there is the shifted entryway for the pre-kindergarteners. Its new location will mean that the area south of the buses will be even more crowded, and the street will likely to be further blocked for traffic attempting to get to and from Admiral Way, extending the daily jam fifty or more yards up the street and filling it with the least visible, most vulnerable and least safety-conscious of children.

All together, I worry that the lack of community involvement in this plan (the clever manipulation of COVID to ensure minimum participation) will not only produce a pluperfect mess of traffic, a very dangerous situation for young children, and a mass of very angry parents and residents, all resentful of the daily ordeal of competitive parking. I live on 59th across from the baseball diamond, and I am a regular witness to the daily traffic jam, the illegal parking, and the bad temper of those just trying to get down the street to or from Alki not knowing that it impassable from 2:00 to 3:30 every week day. I just hope that my next heart attack occurs off hours so that the emergency vehicles can get to my house.

It seems to me that there need to be more meetings with the residents and the school staff to fully involve those most affected in the planning process. Currently, I feel like the bulldozers are lined up and ready to roll over some safety concerns that need to be taken a good deal more seriously.

Yours sincerely,

Elisa Kay Sparks
2763 59th Ave SW
Seattle WA 98116