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MPV Opinion Statement

- some personal background
- my priorities
- current conditions that impact those priorities, as I see them
 - internal to the schools
 - external to the schools
- the long-term future as it relates to today's decisions
- the need for action
- my opinion
- the rationale for my opinion

My perspective on the future of the South Burlington Schools is, in part, based in my past. I was raised in South Burlington, I was educated in South Burlington, and I have been a member of the South Burlington School Board for five years. This is my community. Together with many other citizens, I've benefitted from the stability of our city while witnessing changes around us.

As a School Board Member my highest priorities are *the school-related educational and personal experiences of our youth, the wise use and responsible control of our financial resources, and the personal safety of our students and employees*. Opinions, decisions, and actions must address these priorities preferentially.

Current conditions, internal and external to our schools, that have caused us to invest considerable amounts of personal time for many of our citizens, our professional staff, and invited experts include the following:

- aging school facilities that are use-worn, renovation-torn, and in need to be re-vitalized.
- agency recommendations for facility modification/enhancement that are highly desirable for the maintenance/improvement of our standard of education
- increased traffic and pedestrian congestion in the areas of our schools and our student transportation routes
- continued expansion of property control and noise of the Burlington International Airport
- decline in the number of households with student residents
- City desire for a developed City Center

These changes have been developing over several years and the accuracy of predicting their continued development is high. Long-term planning must be accompanied with flexibility. However, the clarity of conditions in South Burlington in 5, 10, and 15 years is reasonably sharp. Given all of the work that has been done, as well as the work ahead of us, it is time to move decisively. I recognize the advantages of small, close-to-home schools where students can walk to and from, but we have situations that are both out of our control and are predictably getting worse. These issues are trumping the advantages of the traditional neighborhood schools.

Initially we should move to consolidation of our elementary schools into two existing schools. For educational and management advantage, fifth grades should be transitioned into our middle school. The specifics on how to accomplish these changes are extremely important. However, overcoming the inertia to make these changes is more important. To do nothing, given the information that we have is putting off the inevitable for a future board to grapple with. Our Task Force recommended this change. Our entire administrative staff recommended these changes; these are the people we pay well to provide professional advice regarding better ways to formulate educational experiences. Our budgets and our financial resource limitations point in this direction. Our interest in high quality, contemporary educational experiences also suggests this move.

Some additional rationale includes the following:

- a unified pre-K – 12 program will create equity in access for all students, no longer will there be perceived stratification based on which school students attend.
- maintaining one less building will lead to efficiencies in stewardship costs, utilities and some FTE head count.
- consolidation will promote enhanced teacher collaboration and positive student outcomes
- students will enjoy access to additional program options, e.g., foreign language and music
- establishment of a 5th and 6th grade looping team will provide additional educational opportunities for 5th graders.
- enrollment variations will be more effectively managed
- responses to mandated and educationally-desirable changes will be more efficient
- and finally this move would position the District for further consolidation if external pressures warrant it in the future.

Subsequently we should initiate a study of the high school facility needs and costs associated with renovation or rebuild. The Task Force was unanimous in their desire for improvements at the high school level. The need for more adaptable, versatile learning spaces for collaboration between students and faculty is clear. We are training students to be ready for the global world that they will face outside the boundaries of our community. We know that employers seek new hires whose abilities are aligned with that global economy. Nearly every small renovation made during my tenure on this Board has been riddled with issues resulting from the age and design of our high school structure.

Education systems will never be perfect, but they should always be evolving. We should consistently strive to make improvements.

My opinion at this point in time is most aligned with Option #3.

