

**NEIGHBORHOOD VITALITY
AND HOLLAND'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY
AND
MAINTAINING THE IMPORTANCE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN
NEIGHBORHOODS WITHIN THE CITY OF HOLLAND**

A Report to the City of Holland Planning Commission
by the Neighborhood Impact Study Committee (NISC)

in response to
the Restructuring and Repurposing of the
Holland Public Schools Elementary School Program

September 19, 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE
- III. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION OF NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACTS
- IV. STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING POSSIBLE IMPACTS

- A. Projected Positive Impacts
- B. Strategies, Issue by Issue

- Issue 1: Parental/School Staff Involvement.
- Issue 2: Collaboration Between Schools and Neighborhoods.
- Issue 3: Safety of Children.
- Issue 4: Homeownership.
- Issue 5: City Appeal.
 - A. Race and Income.
 - B. Marketing.
 - C. Specialty Schools.
 - D. MAX Transportation.
 - E. Parking and Traffic.

- V. OTHER RELATED ISSUES
- VI. CONCLUSIONS

APPENDICES

- A. LITERATURE CITATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY
- B. TABLE OF HOW CHILDREN GET TO SCHOOL, 2002-2003 YEAR.

I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The decision made by the Holland Public Schools Board of Education to restructure the elementary school program with each elementary school building housing two grades and changing the functions (repurposing) in two other elementary school buildings is a decision having community-wide implications. The City of Holland Planning Office identified a range of potential consequences early in 2003 and recommended that there be a “public collaborative” discussion of these and other impacts in order “to realize the best conditions for our neighborhoods, our schools, and our children”.

The Planning Commission created a committee called the *Neighborhood Impact Study Committee* (NISC) with the following charge:

“This Study Committee has been assembled by the Planning Commission in order to better understand the possible impacts on the City’s neighborhoods of recent actions taken by the Holland Public Schools (HPS) to restructure the elementary school program and to re-purpose two current elementary school buildings. A basic premise of the work of this Committee is that the decision to restructure the program has been made and is being implemented and the intentions of this Committee do not include attempting to overturn this decision. Rather, in a careful and expeditious manner, the charge is to seek relevant information and answers to questions regarding the potential impacts of the elementary schools restructuring and re-purposing on neighborhoods in the City of Holland. Upon defining potential impacts, the Committee will develop a summary of potential steps that may be taken to avoid or mitigate any possible negative impacts and to enhance and promote the possible positive impacts of these school changes.

With this Committee also comes the opportunity to broaden the scope of City/Neighborhood/School dialogue on planning and development issues and opportunities about which cooperation and common purpose can lead to mutually beneficial efforts.”

NISC did not attempt to predict or identify academic implications of the Board’s decision, nor did the Committee attempt to examine the financial considerations of the approved changes.

NISC identified many instances where engagement and response by Holland Public Schools is vital. Moreover, cooperation and open dialogue between Holland Public Schools, the City, and community members / groups is needed in order to fully understand the impacts and opportunities of school restructuring and repurposing.

In addition to the risk factors cited in this report, NISC recognizes that there are positive opportunities for Holland, which include increasing the level of diversity in all schools and the interactions between parents from different neighborhoods. There are new reasons and opportunities for marketing the City as an attractive place to live and invest. Committee members were reminded of the many community assets that must be promoted and that there are many interested community groups who share this belief. Therefore, the need to collaborate with area realtors and neighborhood groups has never been greater.

NISC hopes that these changes will result in positive changes and growth in the City while enhancing Holland Public Schools’ ability to provide quality education within tightly constrained resources. To this end this report is dedicated.

NISC membership was appointed by the Planning Commission and included:

- Nicki Arendshorst, Chair (Planning Commission)
- Mike Alsgaard (Planning Commission)
- Mark Bonnette (Maplewood School neighborhood)
- Robert Carlson (Holland Public Schools)
- Meg Fitch (Lakeview School neighborhood)
- Lorrie Hackney (Jefferson School neighborhood)
- Joe Hoffer (Holland Public Schools, replacing Deb Sterken July 1)
- Angie Morris (Longfellow School neighborhood)
- Victor Orozco (City Council)
- Claudia Scharlow (Harrington School neighborhood)
- Deborah Sterken (Holland Public Schools, departed June 30)
- Amie Stid (Van Raalte School neighborhood)
- David Stubbs (Washington School neighborhood)

With assistance by:

- Dave Medema (Facilitator & President, Medema Consulting Associates LLC, Grand Rapids)
- Phil Meyer (City Planning and Development Manager and staff to the City of Holland Planning Commission)

The committee's work was conducted in open session and observed by news media and local residents. The work included three overlapping efforts. First, there was a review of research describing the relationship between schools and neighborhoods and how school realignments and transitions affect neighborhoods. The second effort involved a series of eight meetings held between May 27 and August 19 in which NISC identified potential impact areas and the strategies that should be undertaken to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts and to identify and reinforce positive opportunities for improving our neighborhoods. The third effort will include a presentation to the Planning Commission, with possible subsequent presentations anticipated to the broader community, including the Board of the Holland Public Schools and Holland City Council. This report as adopted by the membership on September 19, 2003 details NISC's findings and recommendations.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Background.

An internet search and review of relevant literature by City Staff yielded a variety of resources that offer insight into the potential impacts of school closures and significant school changes on the vitality and desirability of the neighborhoods in which they are located (see Attachment A, a bibliography of resources with key readings highlighted). While these various studies, position papers, and anecdotal reports suggest the potential for significant neighborhood impacts in certain situations, no directly comparable situations were found which documented or analyzed similar community circumstances and similar school changes.

Situations cited in the literature vary in terms of quality of neighborhood schools, the success of existing schools and school curriculum, the specific types of changes proposed, levels of participation and commitment to schools and neighborhoods, and the personal commitment levels of all players in the community. Furthermore, while Holland's neighborhoods in some ways differ one from another, and more distinctly from "neighborhoods" in surrounding communities, Holland's neighborhoods appear to differ more significantly from many of the larger communities referenced in the various literature. These neighborhood and community differences include such factors as the compactness of development, walkability, proximity to institutions and services, age and character of housing stock, and the overall socio-economic condition and status of existing neighborhoods. Individuals and families making housing and neighborhood choices bring a variety of personal values, needs, and expectations that greatly affect their housing choices in response to those differences.

Review of the literature also included the work of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA), which has worked to build a region-wide (Holland-Muskegon-Grand Rapids) consensus on defining a vision for community growth that retains and enhances the many unique features and relationships of our area while avoiding the sprawl of development that threatens these same amenities. One conclusion the Alliance notes is that cities, including Holland, are challenged by a range of interdependent economic, demographic, and lifestyle trends. The WMSA concludes that, if we are to grow regionally in a more responsible manner, then urban center revitalization is a critical objective. The health and strength of our urban school systems and the vitality of our neighborhoods are interdependent parts of this revitalization. Schools traditionally have been focal points of a neighborhood's activities, community relationships, and identity.

The Committee agreed that homeownership was strongly related to the appeal of the city's neighborhoods, and raised questions regarding the reasons for moving into a neighborhood and the possible reasons for a perceived diminished appeal of the neighborhood. Neighborhood trends were explored and included census data. While providing some useful overall data, the material at hand was not fully useful in examining the questions at hand. Further information regarding homeownership was provided through interviews with two area realtors.

Note: The Committee thanks realtors Graham Duryee of Greenridge Realty and Steve Semer of Remax Realty for their interest and contribution to this discussion.

Discussion with the two realtors was quite informative. They suggested the overall perception of the homebuyers with whom they work seems to be that the new Focus Schools possibly will result in a neutral change for most neighborhoods, although the Lakeview and Washington School neighborhoods may be exceptions. The Lakeview and Washington neighborhoods have lost their neighborhood schools. Washington School in particular, according to some

Committee members, the realtors, and to many vocal neighborhood residents, was considered to be the dominant anchor of a traditional, walkable, urban neighborhood made up of a unique socio-economic blend of people. The repurposing of these schools to other education-related uses raised questions regarding possible neighborhood impact and desirability.

While people choose to reside in a certain neighborhood for various reasons, the realtors felt that affordability- as may be defined individually by each family- tops the list. After that, other reasons include: distance to work, perceived quality of the neighborhood school, children's needs (playground, close to services, etc.), distance from retail and other services, and recommendations or biases of family members or co-workers. According to the realtors, people may also choose not to locate in a city neighborhood because of negative perceptions of a particular neighborhood or because there may simply be a limited number of houses from which to choose in that part of town. Realtors indicated that they thought an individual neighborhood's school now will be much less of a drawing factor because of the two-year limit of attendance in the new focus schools. The realtors suggested that possibly in the short term, restructuring could have a negative effect, because some people do not want to be in a "transitional" situation, not knowing what effect the focus schools will have on property values or neighborhood conditions such as traffic and parking issues.

On the other hand, the two realtors stated that after an initial flurry of concern, many of their current and former clients are taking a "wait and see" attitude. Assessing neighborhood viability a year after the restructuring will be important for these current homeowners and potential homebuyers.

As reflected in the spirit and effort of NISC, Holland is fortunate and perhaps unusual in two important ways: first, the community is blessed with extremely high quality neighborhoods and schools; and second, the community benefits from the extraordinary commitment and community-wide efforts of many, many people striving to assure these community assets remain strong. This is clearly not the situation in which most communities (many of those subject to analysis as found in the literature) find themselves.

B. Possible Impacts Identified Through Literature Search.

This void in identifying directly applicable case studies leads to the immediate realization that projecting certain impacts is highly speculative. At best, the material collected offers insight into the kinds of possible neighborhood impacts that the community should be looking out for as implementation of the changes proceeds. The range of those possible impacts include:

1. Loss of the ability to walk to school may threaten the appeal of the City's neighborhoods.
2. Nationwide and locally, there is growing concern over the increasing obesity in children. From a neighborhood or community health perspective, the loss of the ability to walk to schools eliminates one opportunity for exercise being a part of the normal everyday life of the community's children.
3. Home values may be at risk due to loss of neighborhood schools.
4. If home values decline, conditions may result that are conducive for investors to convert properties from owner-occupancy to renter occupancy, contrary to the adopted Housing Goals of the City.
5. The restructuring may initiate a changing role that schools play within neighborhoods.

C. Ongoing Monitoring.

The uncertainty of the possible impacts on the neighborhoods of Holland has led the Committee to suggest the need for on-going monitoring of a variety of conditions and changes over an extended period of time. Such monitoring logically falls predominantly on the shoulders of the City and Holland Public Schools who have access to relevant information, although others could very well contribute to this effort. Beginning points for the identification of such conditions worthy of monitoring is outlined relative to various topics in the recommended strategies that follow.

III. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION OF NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACTS

NISC began its deliberations by identifying a range of potential neighborhood impacts from changes in schools structure and purpose. The following impacts were identified and categorized by the Committee in response to the request to: "Identify neighborhood impacts due to re-structuring and re-purposing that this Committee should examine."

Physical Impacts

1. Cost- roads, property values, infrastructure
2. Safety of Children (crossing roads, security)
3. Green space
4. Traffic congestion in the neighborhoods
5. Busing schedules and routes

Desirability Impacts

1. Homeownership
2. Neighborhood ownership and involvement
3. Appeal of the entire school district
4. Change from "neighborhood school" to "focus school"
5. City's appeal

Social Impacts

1. Child's ability to develop freedom and responsibility, child's relationship to neighborhood
2. Traditional neighborhood barriers lessened.
3. Parental involvement in non-neighborhood schools
4. Minority families participation and school involvement

Prioritizing Neighborhood Impacts

NISC members discussed these potential impacts and determined that the following five issues were of highest priority for further discussion and response:

1. Relationship of Parents to Neighborhoods and Schools
2. Collaboration between Schools and Neighborhoods
3. Safety of Children
4. Homeownership
5. City's Appeal.

In subsequent discussion focusing on these five issues, the interwoven nature of the many factors became quite clear and eventually every one of the issues on the longer list received some further attention. The reader will note many of these "lower priority" issues surfacing in various strategies.

Special Notes

1. Green space- This issue was a very prominent concern particularly relating to the desire for retaining the recreational and green spaces at both Lakeview and Washington Schools. HPS Board President Sterken stated that this is not an issue as the Board is committed to retaining

these areas as green space and will be exploring the opportunity for a City/School partnership to assure long term appropriate use and maintenance.

2. Traffic/Parking/Congestion Issues at Each School- While there are some related recommendations regarding congestion issues at each school, there is a separate effort by the Holland Public Schools Transportation staff, City Department of Community Services and Development, and Holland Police Department to identify specific known and potential traffic and parking problems at each school and either attempt to make adjustments in advance of the school year or monitor the situations at the beginning of school in order to rapidly respond with any necessary corrective measures at each school.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING IMPACTS

The previous sections described the process and substance of material covered in Committee discussions. On a topic by topic basis, the Committee then identified specific strategies that the Committee believes will allow the community to best position itself to celebrate potential positive impacts on neighborhoods resulting from the school changes, while enabling the schools and neighborhoods to best mitigate or avoid potential negative impacts that may result from those changes.

A. Projected Positive Impacts.

Through intense discussion, the Committee found the following important potential positive impacts of the proposed school changes as they will impact neighborhoods:

1. Kids in all neighborhoods will become familiar with other city neighborhoods beyond their own;
2. Kids will become friends with other kids in other neighborhoods at a young age, breaking down racial, cultural, and economic barriers;
3. Families will meet other families from other neighborhoods establishing new relationships and a broader sense of community;
4. There will be a spreading out of all children, including but not limited to at-risk children, children from lower income families, and racially diverse children, throughout all elementary schools; and
5. The east and west PTOs will get the benefit of more active parents serving multiple schools rather than segregated in one neighborhood.

B. Strategies, Issue by Issue.

In a priority setting process, NISC identified the following five areas of focus for defining key strategies. NISC is a body empowered only to report back to the Planning Commission, with no authority to convene committees or assign responsibilities. During the course of discussion, however, the Committee identified those individuals or groups that most immediately are in position to be “key implementers” of these strategies. The Planning Commission should find an appropriate way in which there can be accountability for implementation of these strategies over the coming months.

Issue #1:

Encourage Parental/School Staff Involvement with Schools and Neighborhoods

Discussion on this issue focused on the following:

- the challenge for parents of HPS elementary students to maintain (or increase) their level of involvement in both elementary school functions and neighborhood activities in the face of less convenient and perhaps more difficult access to elementary schools;
- the possible impact on neighborhood identity, familiarity, and cohesion when children and parents spend only two years at each school in three neighborhoods rather than six years at one school in their “home” neighborhood;
- the additional challenges for each school’s staff to thoroughly get to know the families, neighborhoods, and circumstances from which their students come when dealing with a wider range of students from several neighborhoods; and

- the increased diversity anticipated in all elementary schools, with the percentage of minority students expected to increase in some schools and decline in others.

Strategies:

1. Encourage the involvement in all elementary schools of neighborhood parents who have, have had, or will have children attending the neighborhood's school.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Elementary School Staff and PTOs

2. Encourage school staff to maintain contact with and seek volunteer assistance from all neighborhood residents.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Elementary School Staff, Principals, and Neighborhood Organizations

3. Examine and expand ways that school staff can keep informed about activities and happenings in the neighborhood surrounding their schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS School Staff, Neighborhood Organizations, City Neighborhood Liaison, Churches, Library

4. Examine and expand ways that neighborhood residents can keep informed about activities and happenings at the schools in their neighborhood.

Key Implementers:

- City Neighborhood Liaison, PTOs

Issue #2:

Collaboration between Schools and Neighborhoods.

The discussion accompanying this issue focused on the recognition that both schools and neighborhoods benefit from collaborations and involvement of parents, students, and school staff in issues of mutual interest. Any potential disassociation or cutting of ties that connect the schools and neighborhoods must creatively be avoided or compensated for by efforts to keep the schools a central part of the neighborhoods and to keep all neighborhood residents connected to and supportive of those schools within their neighborhoods.

The loss of a traditional neighborhood school can be mitigated by encouraging the neighborhood and broader community to continue to use that school beyond the "normal" school day. Before the restructuring, a neighborhood school was often the focus of after school activities such as Cub Scouts and PTO meetings. This is expected to continue with the Focus Schools. However, there may be a greater opportunity that can keep these schools functioning as a central part of the neighborhoods within which they are located. School districts across the country are exploring ways to make school facilities function in new and expanded ways as community centers, with a broad diversity of activities accommodated within school buildings and on school property.

Strategies:

1. Develop an inventory of school facilities (indoor and outdoor) and a list of users and schedule of current year-round use.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board, School Principals, and PTOs, City Recreation Division

2. Promote a redefinition of neighborhood schools to expand their role as community facilities (encouraging greater use of facilities for alternative uses during non-school hours such as for public and/or private meetings, family and block reunions, neighborhood recreation, information resource center, summer programming, etc).

Key Implementers:

- HPS, Charter Schools, and Private Schools Board Members, Administrative Staff, School Principals, City Recreation Division, and Local Churches.

3. Compensate for any diminished school role in each neighborhood by increased collaborations with other neighborhood institutions (i.e. churches and library).

Key Implementers:

- HPS, Charter Schools, and Private Schools Administrative Staff and Principals, Churches, Library

4. Hold regular “community days” where schools in neighborhoods get out and work, interact, and enhance the neighborhood (i.e. clean-up days, plant flowers, help elderly homeowners, share skills such as music or artwork, etc.).

Key Implementers:

- City Neighborhood Liaison Office and HPS, Charter Schools, and Private Schools Administrative Staff

5. With the repurposing of Lakeview and Washington Schools, the retention of recreational areas and green space around each school was voiced as a concern. The School Board has committed to retaining these areas for neighborhood and community recreational use. The Schools, the City, and the neighborhoods are encouraged to work together to assure that these community facilities and green spaces at all schools remain available and in good condition while providing important amenity to each neighborhood. The model for cooperation that resulted in school/park improvements in Holland Heights provides an excellent example of the benefit of such cooperation.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Facilities Staff and City Leisure and Cultural Services Department

6. The City Recreation Program has in recent years been challenged on two fronts regarding youth recreation: finding adequate accommodations for organized indoor team sports activities, and obtaining equivalent participation by children from each elementary school. The opportunity to utilize school facilities more intensely and the mixing of neighborhood populations throughout the elementary schools should encourage more success in each of these areas.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Facilities Staff and City Leisure and Cultural Services Department

7. Encourage neighborhood block activity by identifying, cataloging, and promoting existing block and neighborhood associations (may be formal or informal), and developing new associations where they do not currently exist.

Key Implementers:

- City Neighborhood Liaison Office

8. Schools should encourage more broadly the involvement and participation of all neighbors in the activities of their neighborhood's school.

Key Implementers:

- HPS, Charter Schools, and Private Schools Board Members, Administrative Staff, and School Principals

9. Urge the Holland Police Department to increase their presence in all Focus Schools to ensure safety and comfort of students. Educate police officers regarding how school population profiles will change as a result of restructuring.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Administrative, Holland Police Department, and City Council

10. Explore mechanisms by which individuals and businesses can provide additional financial resources to the schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS and Charter Schools Board Members and Administrative Staff

Issue #3: Safety of Children.

Discussion on this issue revolved around concerns the Committee identified relating to students getting to and from school. With the restructuring, busing is the preferred alternative to the automobile for getting students to and from their Focus School by motor vehicle facilitated by a new system of bus routes, shuttle stops, and scheduling. Concerns about congestion were expressed, especially with the anticipated combination of increased bus and car use. This potential will be more acute in the traditional central neighborhoods where historically there have been higher percentages of walkers and bikers. Issues of pedestrian safety and student discipline also surfaced, especially in the vicinity of congested school areas and at designated bus stops and gathering points.

Issues relating to safety differ with the repurposed schools. At Washington School, the introduction of ESL programming brings older "students" and different patterns of concentrated activity, suggesting potential for concern about traffic, parking, hours of activity, and pedestrian safety. Similar kinds of issues at Lakeview School have not been identified. In fact, regular fears of students crossing 32nd Street between the school and playfield will disappear during school hours. As the recreational area is to remain, this concern will persist for children attempting to cross 32nd Street during non-school hours. While a plan has not been reviewed by this Committee, Holland Public Schools has indicated there should be adequate on-site parking for the needs of the school district administrative functions.

Strategies:

1. Meet with high school principal and assistant principal, middle school staff, and elementary school staff to identify areas of traffic and pedestrian safety concern and to develop measures to increase pedestrian safety.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff, HPS School Staff

2. Request increased traffic ordinance enforcement and safety measures around parking areas of schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff, Holland Police Department, Township Police Deputies

3. Track numbers of students utilizing various modes of transportation getting to and from school (bus, carpool, auto, bike, walk), especially for Van Raalte, Jefferson, Longfellow, and Maplewood.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff and School Principals

4. Track bus driver reports of congestion and complaints and share information with City Traffic Committee.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff

5. Require all HPS staff to use parking lots where available instead of streets.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board and Administrative Staff

6. Market and promote bus riding. (Name the buses, explain the 3 transportation systems.)

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board, Administrative Staff

Issue #4: Homeownership.

As described previously in Section II: Research, the Committee agreed that homeownership was strongly related to the appeal of the city's neighborhoods. Focus centered on the reasons for moving into a neighborhood and the possible reasons for a perceived diminished appeal of the neighborhood due to a loss of a neighborhood elementary school or a restructuring of grade levels/attendance patterns. As previously stated, the impact of this restructuring is uncertain. Relative to the impact on homeownership, it is not clear whether changes will be positive, neutral, or negative.

Assessing neighborhood viability and tracking statistical changes in all neighborhoods a year or longer after the restructuring will be important for understanding the impacts on neighborhood desirability of school changes. Developing accurate monitoring techniques that will isolate school change factors will be difficult.

Strategies:

1. Obtain historical and current information and track changes in location and percentages of owner-occupied and rental properties in each neighborhood, track changes in the number of school-age children in each neighborhood (attending public, charter, and private schools), and monitor the sales price and length of time necessary to sell homes in each City neighborhood by comparison with non-City neighborhoods.

Key Implementers:

- City Planning and Community Development Offices, All schools.

2. Maintain outward appearance of the schools and nearby City infrastructure in an effort to keep neighborhoods attractive to potential home buyers.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Administrative Staff and City Department of Community Services and Development

3. See strategies for Issue #5 for additional related ideas.

Issue #5: Promote the City's Appeal Relative to Quality of Neighborhoods and School/Neighborhood Collaborations.

Discussion by the Committee regarding issues of City Appeal was organized by sub-issue in an effort to categorize issues and for ease of presentation. Frequently during Committee discussion, there were overlapping issues and opportunities.

Sub-Issue A: Change race and income based perceptions of schools:

While increased diversity within each school was mentioned as being a positive result of the restructuring, diversity was also a cause for concern. Potential scenarios involve people of all socio-economic groups and races. People in one socio-economic group may feel that their neighborhood is threatened if the elementary school in their neighborhood is composed of an increasing number of children of different socio-economic class. Minorities, living in neighborhoods where they comprise a majority of the neighborhood school population, may feel discomfort in having their children attend schools where they may become numerically less dominant. The possibility of prejudice and division, whether by race or income, exists on both sides.

Strategies:

1. Promote a welcoming environment in schools and neighborhoods.
 - a. communication
 - b. how schools market themselves, fostering more open, receptive environment;
 - c. increase communication and collaboration between HPS and minority churches and organizations regarding positive activities and to explain changes in school structure (examine how to get word out to non-english speaking community, with more effort and more communication at all levels).

Key Implementers:

- HPS Administration, City Elected Officials, PTOs, Neighborhood Organizations, Churches, and the full range of minority organizations such as- but not limited to- LAUP (Latin Americans United for Progress), LEDA (Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance), AECH (Alliance for Ethnic and Cultural Harmony), Core City Christian Community Development Association, and possibly others.

2. Work with minority leaders and organizations to promote minority support and involvement in schools and neighborhoods.

Key Implementers:

- Elected Officials, HPS Administration

3. Celebrate the diversity that we have:

- a. Develop education strategy for realtors;
- b. Embrace the diversity that fosters “cool cities” (as defined by Governor Granholm’s initiative);
- c. Communicate / market to people who value what we have (and different neighborhoods have different selling points); and
- d. Encourage all people of the community to step outside their comfort zones and better, more effectively communicate with each other.
- e. Increase Positive Media Coverage (regular public statements describing positives)

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board, Administrative Staff, Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance (LEDA)

Sub-Issue B: Marketing of distinct neighborhoods to real estate agents and buyers:

If the neighborhoods of the City of Holland are to continue to thrive, they must be seen as desirable places to live. Each neighborhood has its own set of diverse factors that make it appealing, including but certainly not limited to the individual neighborhood schools. Without the attraction of traditional neighborhood elementary schools, each neighborhood will rely more heavily on other distinguishing factors to find its own special appeal. Why would a potential homebuyer consider moving into the Washington or Van Raalte or Jefferson School neighborhoods? Awareness of the desirability and distinctiveness of each neighborhood must increase to mitigate any effects of the loss of what historically has been a defining element of the City’s neighborhoods- the local elementary school. This is especially important in the Lakeview and Washington School neighborhoods where the removal of a neighborhood school was more complete. Notably, the presence of public charter and private schools retain some opportunity in certain areas of the community to offer a neighborhood school presence.

Strategies:

1. Encourage greater marketing of the City’s neighborhoods by working with realtors and others to catalog and promote characteristics and desirability (affordability, walkability, new role of schools in neighborhoods, etc.).

Key Implementers:

- City Community Development, OurStreet, and Neighborhood Liaison Offices

2. Share selected NISC research (i.e. Maine Study) and other literature with realtors and others to promote understanding of differences between neighborhoods and the categories of people seeking different kinds of neighborhoods.

Key Implementers:

- City Planning Staff

3. Change marketing efforts from those based on perception of individual elementary schools to perception of the overall “focus school” program.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board Members and Administrative Staff

4. Schools have (or should develop) realtors packages.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Administrative Staff

5. Promote / encourage all neighbors as advocates for public school.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board, Administrative Staff

6. Strengthen neighborhood associations with positive agendas to build positive change rather than neighborhood watch / crime orientation, getting youth and institutions (churches, library, etc.) involved.

Key Implementers:

- City Neighborhood Liaison Office and OurStreet Committee

Sub-Issue C: Explore development of specialty schools:

In an effort to encourage exploration of future options for organizing elementary school programs within existing school facilities, the possibility of specialty schools was considered. Instituting a specialty educational program, similar to the arts program initiated at Lincoln School or perhaps devoted to the Spanish language in a location such as Washington or Van Raalte Schools, could provide several benefits: the selected neighborhood would retain its appeal as a walkable neighborhood for those in the neighborhood who might take advantage of the specialty offerings, the School District would be perceived as having a unique “hook” to assist in attracting future students, and both the City and Schools could maintain their high quality of neighborhoods and schools without disruption of the prevailing “Focus School” programming.

It was recognized, however, that this idea of specialty schools was a remote possibility, especially at this time of school transition and economic uncertainty. The Committee feels this opportunity warrants future attention, with the timing of such a discussion dependent upon implementation of the “Focus School” program and availability of resources.

Strategies:

1. Convene a HPS / Community body in 2005 or when financial conditions improve, to explore the opportunity for specialty schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Board and Administrative Staff, Neighborhood Organizations, Specialty Interest Groups such as: non-English language communities, the arts and cultural community, etc.

Sub-Issue D: Coordinate MAX transportation with the needs of parents in the central neighborhoods:

One of the benefits of a traditional neighborhood school is the accessibility to parents. With their children only attending two years in the local school, and greater potential for children at multiple elementary schools, parents without automobiles must find alternative ways to attend school events (e.g. parent-teacher conferences). Holland is fortunate to have the MAX public transportation program available. A reorganization of MAX routing and ridership policies is underway. It is suggested that a discussion among the schools, parents of students, school volunteers, and MAX representatives occur. Coordination between the MAX system programming for the general public and programming for ridership schedules, routing, and school facilities and events is encouraged for mutual benefit. Promotion of student and parent

ridership of the MAX system will allow access to volunteering opportunities, conferences, special events, etc. during the typical school day and after school hours.

Strategies:

1. Encourage in-depth discussion involving the HPS transportation staff, parents of school-aged children, and MAX officials to promote better coordination and increase parent (and student) ridership of the MAX system. This could include:
 - a. special scheduling of buses on days of special events (i.e. conferences);
 - b. special fares for school volunteering;
 - c. bus stops and shelters as close to schools as possible; and
 - d. special fares when parents ride with children.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff and Principals, MAX officials

Sub-Issue E: Preserve and enhance the quality of neighborhoods surrounding schools in the face of the threat of parking and traffic congestion:

The Committee, the City Planning Commission, “Keep City Strong”, Holland Public School staff, and other individuals have expressed concern about the possibility of increased traffic congestion, particularly in the vicinity of the elementary schools and along key routes connecting those schools with more distant neighborhoods. Because children will attend their neighborhood school for only two years, they must use transportation to attend the other Focus Schools more distant from their home neighborhoods.

School buses will be available. However, because many students have never ridden the bus, parents may feel the need to drive their children to school. The potential for the neighborhood areas surrounding each school to be subjected to traffic congestion two or four times a day is a unwelcome prospect for both for the schools and for neighbors and others that need to move through these areas. The quality of life in the immediate neighborhood could suffer.

It is hoped that extensive cooperative planning by HPS and the City of Holland will allay most of the potential problems. Recommendations initiated by the traffic sub-committee should help to mitigate possible congestion. Additional strategies are needed to enhance the quality of the City’s neighborhoods. It is important that all parents, students, and school staff contribute to the success of these recommendations to avoid chronic daily transportation frustrations and to preserve the neighborhood feel.

Strategies:

1. Initiate a major campaign to encourage children to use buses (school and/or MAX) as the preferred alternative to automobile access to schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff and Principals, PTOs

2. For children (and parents, teachers and staff) within walking and bicycling distance of their particular focus school, promote the safe use of bicycles and safe walking habits to encourage these modes over automobile use to access schools.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff and Principals, PTOs

3. For those electing to drive, encourage the use of carpools to help reduce congestion at each school.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff and Principals

4. At every school (HPS, charter, private), be very clear to parents, staff, and neighbors about the ground rules for appropriate parking including faculty and staff parking, visitor parking, drop-off and pick-up parking, and bus parking. Where possible, develop rewards and penalties (carrots and sticks) for encouraging appropriate parking by all. Encourage the use of a “police presence” to encourage cooperation.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation Staff, School Principals

5. These same strategies generally apply to users of the re-purposed Washington and Lakeview Schools as well.

Key Implementers:

- HPS Transportation and Administrative Staff

V. OTHER RELATED ISSUES

A number of issues clearly have impacts on both the Holland Public School system and the community's neighborhoods, yet are beyond the scope of this Committee's study:

- The State's School funding formula;
- The State-controlled School district boundaries;
- The City's ability to encourage development of family-occupied housing; and
- The City's ability to encourage alternative housing opportunities within existing neighborhoods that will allow shifting of empty nesters within their own neighborhood, while freeing up family housing opportunities in existing housing stock.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The work of NISC has concluded with the submission of this report. NISC's mandate was to identify potential impacts and consequences for Holland's neighborhoods of the Holland Public Schools elementary school restructuring and repurposing, and to suggest how the community should address such impacts. The NISC further attempted to identify which community resources need to be mobilized. NISC has no authority to mobilize or acquire resources to implement its recommendations. This Committee has served at the request of the City Planning Commission and forwards these findings and recommendations for use by the Commission. In the Committee's view, the Planning Commission- working with City Council and the School Board- should serve as the body to distribute this information and to encourage buy-in and follow through by parties identified herein as having the responsibility for specific strategies. City Council should regularly inquire about and receive updates regarding issues related to the impact of school restructuring and repurposing. In so doing, the City should maintain dialog with Holland Public Schools regarding relevant findings and progress in implementing these changes.

NISC identified many instances where engagement and response by Holland Public Schools is vital. Yet is also quite clear that cooperation between Holland Public Schools, the City, and community members / groups is needed in order to fully understand and address the various strategies for making the best opportunity for our community in addressing the impacts of school restructuring and repurposing.

In addition to the risk factors cited in this report, NISC recognizes that there are positive opportunities for Holland, which include increasing the level of diversity in all schools and the interactions between parents from different neighborhoods. There are new reasons and opportunities for marketing the City as an attractive place to live and invest. Committee members were reminded of the many community assets that must be promoted and that there are many interested community groups who share this belief. Therefore, the need to collaborate with area realtors and neighborhood groups has never been greater.

NISC hopes that these changes will result in positive changes and growth in the City while enhancing Holland Public Schools' ability to provide quality education within tightly constrained resources. To this end this report is dedicated.

APPENDIX A:

LITERATURE CITATIONS WITH NARRATIVE.

Walkable Schools.

- Education and Smart Growth by the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Liveable Communities, March 2002, page 5;
This article discusses the intersect of concerns between education reformers and smart growth advocates. Smart growth advocates include among their major issues a focus on walkable schools. They cite a South Carolina study that found that students were four times as likely to walk to school to schools built before 1983 than after, noting that the newer schools are often built farther from community centers with busing or driving conceived as the sole means of getting to and from school.
- Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School by Constance E. Beaumont with Elizabeth G. Pianca for the National Trust for Historic Preservation; November 2000. The Education and Smart Growth report can be read together with this report and numerous other articles and literature that talk about the desirability of living in neighborhoods where children can walk to school.
- Good Schools- Good Neighborhoods, Center for Urban and Regional Studies- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 2003, pages 11-13.
This report was prepared to examine the main factors affecting the location and design of schools in North Carolina. This article refers to a number of other sources as it discusses the terms "walkability" and "neighborhood and community schools", cites a Smart Growth Network summary of Principles for Smart Growth that includes "create walkable neighborhoods", describes conditions both favorable and unfavorable that affect the walkability of schools, and provides recommendations to encourage school organization that supports walkability. "The interest in promoting more walkable schools is not based on nostalgia- a throwback to woebegone days when most kids walked to school and everyone knew their neighbors. It is based instead on preserving the character and vitality of existing neighborhoods, providing opportunities for kids to integrate exercise into their daily routines, and improving academic performance" (page 18). While not original research, this is a thoughtful example of pulling various research and literature together to begin to draw inferences about potential relationships between schools and neighborhoods.
- Making Schools Important to Neighborhoods Again by Elizabeth A. Della Valle, Governor's Summit on Growth, Columbia, South Carolina, March 2001.
This presentation by an administrator in the Maine State Planning Office describes a State-adopted program entitled "Great American Neighborhoods. The author describes traditional characteristics of strong neighborhoods that have been found desirable based on a survey of Maine's home-buying public. Common characteristics in these neighborhoods include, among others, that "they are compact and walkable from one end to the other... and they usually have a civic core- a school, church, library- that gives the neighborhood its

identity”. The report alludes to a survey of homebuyers conducted in Maine (see bibliography for “Market for Traditional Neighborhoods”) and cites specifically a National Association of Realtors publication “New Schools for Older Neighborhoods: Strategies for Building Our Communities’ Most Important Assets” and the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s report entitled: Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can’t Walk to School”. Pages 9-16 of the latter report describe what the country/neighborhoods are losing as neighborhood schools are closed or removed.

Home Values- Loss of Neighborhood Schools.

- How Much Is A Neighborhood School Worth?, William Bogart Dept. of Economics and Center for Regional Economic Issues, Case Western Reserve University, 2000, pages 294-297.
“This paper investigates the impact on house prices of a school district realignment (including some school closures) that led to busing of some school children in a suburb (Shaker Heights, Ohio) characterized by neighborhood schools before the realignment”. Citing a variety of research, the paper the effects of redistricting, including the “neighborhood schools effect” tying redistricting to perceived reduction in quality of schools (parental involvement, student after-school activities, walkability). The key finding in this situation was that the loss of a neighborhood school reduces house value, all else being equal.

Home Values- Owner to Rental Conversions.

- Schools and the Community: The Fiscal, Social, and Educational Impacts of Schools Facilities Decisions, City of Fargo ND, February, 2001, page 5.
According to this document, prepared as a staff report with minimal research citations, “housing units will convert from owner-occupied to renter-occupied as property values decline”. With this statement, repeated in a different manner in another unrelated document (Understanding Neighborhood Change, cited below), comes a caution, a need to take note of this potential concern and to monitor changes in the Holland community that can track any such impacts should they surface.
- City of Holland Housing Goals and Policies, adopted by Holland City Council, 1995.
“Good Neighborhoods” are characterized in this document in a traditional manner, focusing “around public buildings such as schools, churches, or commercial areas... optimally a five minute walk from the center to any edge of the neighborhood and containing a balanced mix of activities such as dwelling, schooling, recreating and shopping...”. One characteristic applying to all neighborhoods is that “owner-rental ratios are reasonably close to the ratio found in the MACC area” (approximately 74 % at the time of the report). With existing ratios in many blocks of the City significantly below this target, the report recommended that homeownership opportunities be increased.
- “Homeownership and Neighborhood Stability”, by William M. Rohe and Leslie S. Stewart in Housing Policy Debate by the Fannie Mae Foundation, Volume 7, Issue 1, 1996.
This paper explores the relationship between homeownership rates and indicators of neighborhood stability. Exploring the literature on this complex

issue, the paper proposes a conceptual model linking homeownership with neighborhood stability, and then testing the model through a review of literature and then through an original empirical analysis. Suffice it to say that this study suggests that modest changes in homeownership rates are clearly associated with changes in property values. Again, the assertion relative to Holland is simply that this is an area to watch as school redistricting may impact property values.

- **Understanding Neighborhood Change: The Role of Expectations in Urban Revitalization** by Rolf Goetze, Research Department of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1979.
The purpose of this book was to “develop and explore new concepts of neighborhood change”. In a chapter focusing on neighborhood dynamics, in which the admonition is to observe real conditions, the author provides an example of what can happen to housing in “declining markets”, offering the example of declining owner-occupant interest in a neighborhood potentially being replaced by various other investor-oriented scenarios.

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How Much Is A Good School District Worth? By William T. Bogart and Brian A. Cromwell in National Tax Journal, Vol. 50; June 1997.

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APPENDIX B

Transportation Estimates for HPS

6/10/03

(Based on an e-mail and information from Phil Meyer, Sandy Heerspink)

<u>School</u>	<u>Student Count</u> ¹	<u>Bus Riders</u> ² %	<u>Car Drop-offs</u> ³ %	<u>Walk/Bike</u> ⁴ %
Harrington	254	16	76	8
Holland Heights	379	16	46	38
Jefferson	350	38	28.5	33.5
Lakeview	235	18	34	48
Longfellow	380	6.5	19.7	73.8
Maplewood	295	24	12	64
Van Raalte	326	5	23	72
Washington	268	8.5	18.6	72.9

Notes:

1. Winter 2003 school count data
2. From HPS transportation director
3. From school principles
4. Calculated: 100% less the other categories

Numbers are estimates. Include school of choice students from outside the district