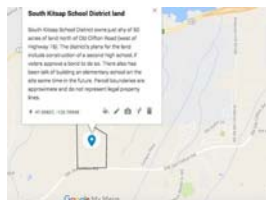


How South Kitsap School District acquired land for a second high school

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(Photo: Chris Henry, Google Maps)

SOUTH KITSAP — One recurring question about South Kitsap School District's bond proposal for a second high school is how the district came by the nearly 60-acre site off Old Clifton Road on which the school would be built if the bond passes Feb. 14.

The [\\$172.6 million measure](http://www.kitsapsun.com/news/local/sk--to-run-another-bond-measure-feb-14-43191e42-26d9-7607-e053-0100007f0870--405368826.html) (<http://www.kitsapsun.com/news/local/sk--to-run-another-bond-measure-feb-14-43191e42-26d9-7607-e053-0100007f0870--405368826.html>), on the ballot with a levy renewal, also includes more than \$40 million in [improvements at all existing schools](/story/news/education/2016/12/26/education-spotlight-sks-oldest-school-dates-wwii/95771494/) (</story/news/education/2016/12/26/education-spotlight-sks-oldest-school-dates-wwii/95771494/>), including South Kitsap High School.

Here's the history on the Old Clifton property, according to an [article in the Kitsap Sun from 1999](http://web.kitsapsun.com/archive/1999/06-23/0027_south_kitsap_school_district_buy.html) (http://web.kitsapsun.com/archive/1999/06-23/0027_south_kitsap_school_district_buy.html), information gathered by Superintendent Karst Brandsma, new to the district in August, and long-time board member Chris Lemke.

In the mid-1980s, the McCormick Land Company was developing acreage it owned west of Highway 16, building homes that are now the McCormick Woods development. As a condition of development regulations, the company set aside 20 acres for eventual purchase by the district. The requirement was meant to soften the development's impact on the school district. McCormick Land Company also paid the district development impact fees.

The district didn't buy the land in the 1980s, however, because it didn't have enough students in the area at the time, according to then-Superintendent Bill Lahmann, quoted in the article.

In 1999, however, the district moved forward with the purchase of the [20 acres south of Old Clifton Road](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1fvfAPxCetdFteiev_bwiJ3QQjgs&ll=47.50836938075038%2C-122.70928144999999&z=13) (https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1fvfAPxCetdFteiev_bwiJ3QQjgs&ll=47.50836938075038%2C-122.70928144999999&z=13), which it got for the bargain-basement price of \$48,000.

The district received 12 acres at no cost and paid \$6,000 per acre for the remaining eight.

Lahmann lauded the deal. "Flat property with utilities that you could build a school on — you can't touch it for \$6,000 an acre," Lahmann said.

The money came from the district's capital account, which holds impact fees and other capital funding. The land was to be held for future needs but was not large enough for a high school, according to Lahmann, who added the district's goal was to get a second high school in the south end of the district.

District officials were searching for a site of roughly 50 acres but hadn't found one that was suitable, the 1999 article states. "When they find one, the district will likely approach voters with a bond issue to build a high school."

Lemke said the district had been looking all over South Kitsap for a parcel big enough for a high school. The district owned a small piece of land at the edge of Banner forest, which created a focus on the south end for a possible swap, Lemke said. The district was not stuck on the south end, however. The biggest issue was finding a parcel of adequate size.

Fast forward to 2005, when the district negotiated with McCormick Woods developers to exchange the prime 20 acres south of Old Clifton Road for undeveloped, forested land north of Old Clifton. The district sealed the deal after a couple years of negotiations, according to Lemke, paying \$2 million for just shy of 60 acres (albeit without utilities). Although this wasn't the "bargain basement" price of the previous deal, the district got a valuable piece of land for a relatively low cost, Lemke said.

"We got that property for a really good price by the time it closed," Lemke said.

The land in 2014 was [valued at \\$3.6 million by the Kitsap County Assessor](https://psearch.kitsapgov.com/webappa/index.html?parcelID=322401-4-054-2006) (<https://psearch.kitsapgov.com/webappa/index.html?parcelID=322401-4-054-2006>); subsequent years show no value since the school district is a public entity and doesn't pay taxes.

The school board, of which Lemke was a member at the time, had compared the Old Clifton property to other potential sites for sale in South Kitsap and determined it was the most suitable piece of land in the best location for the best price. "We did some due diligence before we made this deal," Lemke said.

The district also spent an undetermined amount to address water run-off on the property, making the site "more useable for a high school and future elementary school site," according to Brandsma. Lemke confirmed this, saying the district worked with McCormick Woods, which offered to

take stormwater off the 60-acre site if the district helped with the cost of a stormwater utility on surrounding residential parcels. Lemke said it was a favorable arrangement for the district because it preserved acreage on the school site that would have been taken up with a retention pond.

The parcel was in Port Orchard's urban growth area and is now within city limits. Surrounding schools included Sunnyslope Elementary, one of only two elementary schools in the district that had increasing enrollment at the time.

The good news for the district was that it now had a parcel large enough for a high school. The downside is that it lacked utilities. If the bond passes and a second high school is built, bringing utilities to the land will require money that's been factored into the cost of the 2017 bond.

Brandsma also responded to the often-heard comment that the second high school would be an elitist place serving the well-heeled residents of McCormick Woods by saying the school's service area would include low-income feeder schools. Cedar Heights Middle School, Sidney Glen Elementary and Burley Glenwood Elementary all qualify for federal funding based on the number of students who receive free and reduced-cost lunch (a measure of a school's relative wealth or poverty). In addition, homes in The Ridge range in value from the low- to mid-200,000s, basically entry-level homes.

"It will be a diverse student population as South Kitsap High School is today," Brandsma said.

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