



SCHOOL DISTRICTS - MORE THAN JUST AN AFFECTED JURISDICTION

Presented by Tara Beard
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12:00 – 1:00 PM

Webinar Summary: The Metropolitan Land Planning Act requires that communities submit proposed comprehensive plan updates to affected school districts for review and comment at least six months prior to submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. Historically, however, very few school districts have taken advantage of this opportunity to provide feedback. Council staff has spent the last year speaking with school district staff to learn more about how comprehensive planning and school district planning intersect.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

- 1. Historically there has not been a central resource for accurate school district boundaries. Knowing exactly where that line is matters. Where did the boundary data come from and how accurate is it??**

The boundaries we have used in our mapping comes from data provided by the Minnesota Department of Education, which is updated annually. School districts report any changes to their attendance zone which is then used to create the boundary shapefiles, modified based on parcels.

- 2. Will demographic data also be made available disaggregated by school district boundaries?**

Great question. The short answer is no and that's not because we don't have information like that. It is somewhat time consuming and there are different staff here at the Council besides myself that can do that. We are not expecting all 181 communities to ask for that so we are willing to work with communities that have a special interest in drilling down some of the demographic data in to same ways that we have the land use data available. Contact me and we can talk about it because it does take a lot of staff time we are not pre-creating and providing for you.

- 3. How do you suggest planning for open enrollment?**

That's a great question. I'm not sure we can really affectively do that and I'm certainly not an expert in open enrollment. But it is something that school districts can opt in and out of as their needs are met. It is also something that is guided through state legislation – which can change. I think one of the challenges in the overall question here in about how school district and city plans intersect is the fact that we're planning with different guiding authorities, with different bodies of decision making and there are some ways in which I don't think we'll ever be able to completely understand how we affect each other and from what I know at this point, open enrollment might be one of those things. It's real, it's out there, it has impacts, but I honestly don't know how hard it would be to try to predict that within the context of your comp plan.

- 4. Did you find evidence that charters and/or private schools had a similar impact as public school districts?**

That's a great question too. Yes and no. Just to be really clear, this is more anecdotal than me having any data for it. My impression is that private schools (just speaking about private schools for now) tend to attract people who are willing to spend quite a bit of money on their child's education, so they tend to want to be located in nice areas, and nice buildings that are kept up well so to some extent they may provide some impact to the housing market. But even people that choose to send their children to

private schools, can really care a lot about what the local option is. Families, incomes change, they may not always be able to afford the private school and so knowing that you have public school option is important and matters – even to private school families. I do think that the public school impact is greater even for households choosing private schools. Charter schools, again, are a little bit trickier, starting to get into that open enrollment question where there are just so many moving parts and the rules about them are changing now and again and it can be a lot harder to disseminate exactly how. Charter schools can also be housed in all sorts of innocuous locations so there may not be as many opportunities to impact the housing market there.

5. What professional organizations are involved with school district planning? Would connecting with them be useful?

Absolutely and we are doing that. We are trying to provide a counterpart to the presentation you just saw to the business and finance manager association (professional association) for school districts in the State of MN. My colleague Todd Graham, who is in charge of the forecasts that we do here at the Council, has spoken to them about how you are doing your land use planning and the rules and regulations that you are under and why they may want to pay more attention to those comp plan updates when they roll in. It's a great suggestion and one where we would really like to see the relationships that the Met Council has developed with school district staff on this work

6. Is the PTA a good organization for planners to connect with?

Good question. I think that PTA, unlike other school district policies and procedures is primarily associated with a particular school so when you're thinking about some of these higher level long range planning conversations, focusing on parents of children at one particular school may not be super effective. If you're looking at a particular community that you're feeling like you're having trouble getting engagement on with your comprehensive plan, the PTA may be a good vehicle to get some more community outreach and engagement but this kind of high level comp plan consideration of school districts is really at the district wide level and the business manager level and PTA's are generally parent volunteer organizations.

7. Many school siting locations seem to be shortsighted, often ending up with schools applying for SRTS funding. What role can cities/counties/Met Council have in guiding better site planning on the front end of development? Does this role expand in the future?

Great question. The opportunity I see in this issue is that school districts, for a lot of understandable reasons, really still need a lot of convincing that they need to think beyond the next 1-5 years, maybe 10 at the outside. School districts are so busy and we as government employees know how complex and bureaucratic systems can be. School districts overwhelm me in terms of all the considerations and factors they have to look at and so they are really triaging here when they say this is what's going to happen in the next 1-5 years and we need to make sure we have buildings so that our kids aren't in trailers, this is our bottom line, this is what we have to focus on, etc. But if we can help make it easier for them I think we could gain a lot by working with them to better understand how longer term thinking could be of value to them and us. And then asking what we can do to help them think that way given that they are so busy and so intensely focused on making sure that their shorter-term enrollment needs are met. I think this is a great opportunity and we need to help them understand the importance of long range planning and then help make it easier for them to do it.

8. I've found the examples very helpful in understanding why cities and school districts should communicate, but they all seem like lessons learned from what's gone wrong! Without necessarily naming them, are you able to share any examples of how cities and school districts have worked together really well and avoided the sorts of problems you've discussed?

As I mentioned, there are a handful of school districts in the region that do almost entirely, or entirely, overlap within one city, for example, Eden Prairie, St. Paul, Minneapolis, St. Louis Park. The jurisdictional mismatch challenge isn't there for them and so, understandably, it's a lot easier for them to connect more directly on these sorts of overlap questions. I did give some examples of where maybe things started off ruff but now school districts and cities are communicating really well. It happened to be because of a negative situation, but ended with a positive long term result. I do think that the district with the full-time staff to kind of monitor development, if you're school district encompasses cities with hot housing markets, it may be worth your while to think about that.

9. Do you think most School Districts are aware and ready with an assigned reviewer for comprehensive plans?

I can say that answer is no, unfortunately. I have been trying through these individual interviews and in our outreach to the professional association to get these comp plan updates on their radar but, again, some cities have mailed their review draft to the Superintendent. Some mail them to a community outreach or community education director that they have a relationship with in other contexts. I think just knowing that the business manager, or finance manager, because it's not intuitive to know, are the people to send the plan to. Even if it gets to them eventually – if it gets to them first – they can use that time more wisely. I really encourage you to do more than just mail it, but to have some actual personal connection beforehand, or at least in your cover letter pointing out some of the reasons why it's worth looking at and maybe even earmarking certain pages or sections that you think may apply to them. Again, if we make it easier on them, they will see the value in betting more engaged and really that benefits us too.

10. Is the Metropolitan Council planning to provide any additional technical review assistance to School Districts?

That question actually lines up with the first question with providing more demographic data broken down by school district and city overlap. We are doing that for a handful of school districts that have expressed interest and requested it. Really what they're looking for from us is a more localized understanding of where households with school aged children are locating in our growth projections. So, for a handful of school districts that have met with me or heard the presentation at the professional association that reached out, because it's a handful, we were able to work with them and provide that. Again, if every district wanted that we would have a capacity issue, so we are going to have to 'play it by ear'. If the requests get so onerous, we will have to look at that again. For now, if there's a great interest, we will provide additional information to schools as they are doing their enrollment planning. When it comes to how to review and comment on a comp plan effectively, other than what I mentioned in these interviews (and there are some school districts that I asked, that just weren't interested), with the folks that I did meet with, I was able to talk to them a little bit about what part of the comprehensive plan drafts that might be of most interest to them but no official additional outreaches are planned.

11. Would you find it useful to have cities include a school facility plan in their comp plan? In Oregon, it is state law for this to occur in communities with "high growth school districts".

Interesting. You guys are the local experts. These are your comprehensive plans. I would defer to you. If you think that school districts overlapping with your city are growing so fast and have a need for a longer term look at facilities planning than maybe they're able to do right now, that certainly sounds to me like some deeper engagement is necessary and possibly even in the context of your comp plan because maybe it affects things like roads. The lawsuit example comes to mind. I don't have any red

flags why you wouldn't want to do that. It seems like a lot of work so I think it depends on your particular community but that's a great thought.

12. Lifecycle housing seems important to ensuring turnover so there are new families moving in? Do the demographic consultants consider that?

I think that's actually one of the areas where there is some room for improvement. Of the 14 districts that I spoke with directly, only 2 of them did not use the same demographic consultant for their enrollment projections. While there aren't required standards, by default, a lot of school districts are getting a very similar methodology in their enrollment projections. From what I saw, the analysis was focused heavily on former housing construction trends – projecting those outward without a ton of change, and then assigning these 'yields' to those housing types. I think that this question highlights the nuance that is needed to think about this more carefully. That is a helpful measure but there is a lot of room for additional thought going into how and why new students may come to a district.

13. Does each school district forecast separately or in coordination with other school districts?

Other than having the same consultant in most cases they do not forecast in tandem or in coordination. There's probably a few key geographic areas where a city knows that they're losing a lot of residential students to open enrollment to one particular school in a different district, so those districts may or may not, I don't know, be in conversation about that but I did not hear of any coordinated efforts between school districts in my research.

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