

February 6, 2026

## Hillsdale Neighborhood Association Comments and Requests re: Ida B. Wells Modernization Plans

The Ida B. Wells modernization design team has met the many challenges of this site with a thoughtfully conceived plan that will bring SW Portland's high school into the 21st century. HNA is grateful for PPS's responsiveness to earlier community input on issues such as the Hillsdale Farmers' Market, retaining parking spaces, and preserving the longstanding pedestrian paths that cross the campus.

At this time, HNA has final comments and requests for PPS and City bureaus. We see these as ways to better integrate the new campus into its surrounding community and to honor the commitment and support of voters for the school modernization bond program.

We hope PPS and the City of Portland will address the items below and inform us as far as how and when HNA can continue to influence remaining decisions.

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### I. Safe Student Arrival and Neighborhood Traffic Impacts During Construction

Given that construction will change traffic patterns and may close access points, these issues must be addressed before construction begins.

**1. Student Drop-Off Safety (South Vermont):** A plan for safe student drop-off on the south side of SW Vermont Street should be developed and implemented.

**2. Additional Drop-Off (Capitol Highway):** Consider developing a student drop-off on south side of Capitol Highway east of current bus stop to reduce vehicle congestion in north and east perimeter roads and parking area.

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## II. Access, Connectivity, and Circulation

### A. Vehicular Access

The Wells campus bisects the Hillsdale neighborhood. Maintaining multiple, safe, and continuous routes through campus is essential for neighborhood connectivity, access to local businesses and services, the library, all three public schools, and public safety.

**3. Rieke Road (North–South Vehicle Route):** We request assurances that this route will remain open to public traffic during non-school hours.

**4. Vehicular gates:** Current plans show time-locked vehicular gates at two locations on the Rieke Road. We request clarification on their purpose, hours of operation, conditions under which these gates would be closed, and a 24-hour contact for PPS if gates are closed unexpectedly.

This route is critical for Capitol Highway businesses and for neighborhood connectivity between the northern and southern portions of Hillsdale.

**5. Vehicular Circulation Route around east side of campus:** We request confirmation that no gates or other access restrictions are included in the plan that would restrict vehicular circulation around the campus and that this route will remain open to the public 24/7.

### B. Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

Alternative pedestrian and bicycle routes are critical to the health and safety of SW Portland residents. With few sidewalks in the quadrant, the volunteer-run SW Trails system provides safer pedestrian and bicycle routes for transportation and recreation.

**6. North–South Pedestrian and Bicycle Route (Hi-LO Trail / Trail 3):** We request assurances that the north–south pedestrian and bicycle route adjacent to the Rieke road will remain open to the public 24/7.

We further request that the route be clearly signed as part of the Hi-LO Trail and SW Trail 3

**7. SW Trail 3 (East–West Route Through North Parking Lot):** We request assurances that this segment of SW Trail 3 will remain accessible to the public 24/7.

We further request assurance that the route be clearly signed as part of SW Trail 3.

**8. Main Pedestrian Circulation Path (Between Building and Athletic Facilities):** We request that the primary north–south pedestrian circulation path between the school building and the athletic facilities on the east side of campus remain open to the public 24/7.

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### III. Community Use of Outdoor Facilities

These aspects of the plan will shape how the campus fits and functions within our neighborhood. Will it be a “social infrastructure” asset that allows for appropriate community use, or a campus that remains largely separate and off-limits from the neighborhood around it?

Current fencing and gate plans effectively keep the public on the fringes of the campus, limiting public access to much of the outdoor spaces and locking the surrounding community out of what has been and should continue to be a shared public space.

In recent memory of local residents, adult members of the community spent time not just on the grounds, but inside public schools, attending community meetings or adult education programs in subjects from Spanish to Woodworking. But the public has gradually been edged out of the public high school.

Despite this disconnect, when votes were needed to pass not just one but three school modernization bonds, residents in Hillsdale and across Portland obliged. High schools have become more and more irrelevant to

the daily lives of most Portlanders, yet voters wanted our city’s high school students to have excellent spaces in which to learn.

We are concerned this marks the beginning of a trend to diminish open space on public school campuses that will soon extend to our other neighborhood schools. Will restriction of outdoor spaces at Robert Gray Middle and Rieke Elementary be far behind?

**9. Public Access to Outdoor Sports Facilities:** We request a written guarantee that all outdoor athletic facilities—including ball fields, track, tennis courts, and the multi-use field—will remain unlocked and available for public use:

- During non-school hours
- When not scheduled for school or permitted events
- Throughout the summer

Casual access to outdoor recreation space is essential to neighborhood health and quality of life.

**10. Softball Field Multi-Use Design:** We request that the softball field be designed to accommodate concerts and other community events during summer months.

**11. Student Courtyard and Terrace:** We request that the area identified on renderings as the “Student Courtyard and Terrace” be open to the public after school hours.

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#### IV. Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Planning

**12. BEECN Access:** We request clarification and written assurance on how the BEECN designation will be accommodated in the design, that the site will remain accessible to the public following a major earthquake, and during construction.

The multi-use field is currently designated as a BEECN site. Recent plans show this field enclosed by 10-foot fencing, which would make it inaccessible following a major earthquake.

The Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) indicates that the Ida B. Wells School field at 1151 SW Vermont is a BEECN site (Basic Earthquake Emergency Communication Node). A BEECN site is part of the emergency response system in place in Portland. After a major earthquake, residents can go to a local BEECN site to ask for emergency assistance if telephone service is down or report severe damage or injury.

A BEECN is a temporary radio communications site staffed by at least two volunteers after a major earthquake that takes down phone lines. BEECNs are places where residents can report severe damage or injury or ask for emergency assistance when phones are down.

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#### V. Construction-Related Concerns

Construction of the new campus will impact neighbors, students, and staff for at least three years. HNA believes those impacts can be managed and mitigated by early communication and community input.

**13. Pedestrian Routes During Construction:** Provide documentation of the planned pedestrian routes that will remain open during construction.

**14. Public Pool Access: Clearly identify parking and pedestrian access for the public pool during construction and after completion.**

**15. Construction Personnel Parking:** Provide the neighborhood and business association an opportunity to review and comment on the construction personnel parking plan before implementation.

**16. Hillsdale Farmers' Market:** Clearly identify the area for the Farmers' Market during construction and after completion.

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## V. Neighborhood Quality of Life and Environmental Considerations

**17. Athletic Field Lighting:** Field lighting should be designed to minimize light spillover into surrounding residential areas.

**18. Track Lighting Option:** Consider adding minimal lighting for night-time walkers as an alternative in addition to full-field lighting.

**19. Building Color:** Consider a lighter color for the building exterior. The dark grays chosen are not the only colors that can reference the appearance and value of the trees on the site. Bark can be light gray, yellow, or red. The somber tones of the current color options may feel oppressive, rather than producing feelings of energy and positivity.

We have prepared a list of key studies and standards on perceived safety and well-being and exterior color. Click [here](#) to view.

**20. Traffic Study:** Provide a copy of the PPS traffic study as soon as it is available. If the updated version is unavailable, provide the previous completed version.

### **21. Tree Preservation**

PPS should retain as many of the approximately 15-year-old oak trees surrounding the current baseball field as possible.

**22. Planting Plan:** Provide a plan identifying new tree species to be planted.