

Auke Bay playground revamp gains momentum

CBJ Assembly's reallocation of funds could accelerate renovation plans

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After five years of saving, a parent group at Auke Bay Elementary School managed to set aside almost \$30,000 in hopes of upgrading the playground. Next week, a decision by the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly could drop an extra \$16,000 into the pot.

During the September Juneau School Board meeting, Juneau School District Director of Administration David Means presented to the board completed projects with leftover money and options for those funds. An improvement project at the Harborview and Glacier Valley elementary schools left \$16,544.51 unused. The administration's recommendation was to pay off bonds with the remainder, but a voice in the crowd spoke in favor of another idea.

Auke Bay Elementary principal Lori Hoover, originally in attendance to speak against a new charter school, explained that despite recent renovations at her school, their playground was in a dismal state.

"It's a beautiful school, most of you have been out there, it's an amazing transformation for us, but there was no work done on our playground," Hoover told the board.

Playground renovations were included when the Harborview and Glacier Valley elementary schools were finished, Hoover explained. Her school only had work on the yards drainage, and new playground equipment or refurbishing of existing equipment was not included due to exhausted funds elsewhere.

Hoover said the Auke Bay Parent Teacher Association was close to saving \$30,000 for the project, but with the board's help, two-year's worth of additional fundraising could be achieved with this reallocation.

"Playground equipment is unbelievably expensive," she said. "Any kind of structure is \$30,000 or more, and that's just a blink of an eye, and so (the additional funds) would go a long way toward helping us do some improvements."

Because Auke Bay's improvement project is still open and was a voter approved project, the reallocation of funds is allowed, Means explained. However, approval by the CBJ Assembly, and eventually the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, is also required.

Assembly member Jessie Kiehl, the board's liaison to the Assembly, said although the funds were initially directed toward bond repayment, he predicted the Assembly would oblige the request.

The first round of agreement to the reallocation takes place noon Monday by the Public Works Committee, then it goes on to the Assembly before final approval by the board of education.

Auke Bay PTA president Lauren MacVay said a "yes" from the Assembly could give the group enough momentum to get the new playground installed as early as the next school year.

"What we've saved now is obviously not enough to get the job done," MacVay said of the five-year savings pot. "If the Assembly decides to give us the funds, that gets us significantly closer."

MacVay, president of the PTA since May 2014, said the group has been able to put aside roughly \$6,000 a year and this reallocation is something the school is excited about because it escalates the group's time line for other projects as well.

MacVay said she can't say for certain what type of playground materials would be purchased — the group didn't think they would have to answer that question this soon. The goal would be to eventually do something similar to the Riverbend Elementary School playground project, which planned for two or three large pieces, followed by some "love and attention" to pieces not replaced.

Also like Riverbend, help from Juneau's Rotary Clubs could be on the horizon. After talking with the incoming Glacier Valley Rotary Club president Karen Tarver, MacVay said she is confident, given the boost of this reallocation, community support will help accomplish what for other schools has landed in the range of a \$60,000-project.

The acceleration of this project could mean more than just a chance for current fourth graders to slide down new equipment before leaving Auke Bay. School board member Andi Story said voting to reallocate the funds was a service for the greater community, not just the school.

"What I have noticed from all of our elementary schools, the playgrounds are in high use from the public, and I think that it would be welcomed at that site, too," Story said.