

## The Board's Property Acquisition Plan

Every Board must have a Property Acquisition Plan (PAP) – if you had the opportunity placed in front of you, would you extend the school's footprint? Or do you have a plan for opportunity should it arise? It's hard to imagine having too much land. But even if you're perfectly content with what you have (surely a great blessing from the Lord), you still need a PAP that says that you have no interest. Why?

The Board's job is multi-generational. Its task is to have foresight and make decisions that will ripple down the generations and benefit the children yet unborn. It has to imagine what it will be like to educate 20 and 30 and 40 years hence from a strategic point of view. Land is a VERY important consideration. The four examples that follow are taken from actual examples of schools we know. They are only examples – there are surely many more circumstances that would warrant land and/or property purchase.

1. **Urban shift:** a group of Christian nuns well over a century ago explored possible sites for a school outside Boston. They bought an estate with a stately house, gardens, space to walk, and an imposing entrance. Today that hundred acres is inside Boston and acts as an oasis for its children and for its neighborhood. That is foresight. Notice the multi-generational / children not yet born impact of that decision. As a Board, imagine what your area will be like 100 years or more from now and take the steps that you need in order to give the school life when you are no longer there to serve.
2. **Gentrifying:** a Christian school improved its own facilities and grew by grace to be an aspirational setting within a neighborhood that did not reflect its own excellence. Good and great schools attract families to their area and so it was with this school. It became clear that the large properties but small houses that surrounded were about to change dramatically with a new population moving in. The school's Property Acquisition Plan was a 'heat map' of the areas identifying all the properties that were important to the school as buffers, as Garden of Eden space, as future building space, as potential playing fields. They had accumulated significant funds in their operations reserve and started to acquire those key properties, using that to leverage inspirational donor giving.
3. **High School:** many of our schools have high schools but not the 40 acres that a high school ideally has. Now, of course, in some cities being landlocked is a way of life. If you are in a city block in New York or San Francisco or Toronto (and some other cities around the US and Canada), you are just happy to have a place you can call your own. One school was not quite in that situation and identified two rows of houses that it would like to acquire over time in order to increase opportunities for children. When we were there last, they had one more house to acquire, lived in by a woman who had it in

her will to sell to the school on her death. It had taken over 20 years to that point. She was in good health. Board members must take the long view.

4. In some areas, housing is so expensive that teachers literally have to travel an hour or more to find a place that they can afford, even if well paid. At one school (and not the only one), the Board foresaw what was happening and had already begun buying apartments that would eventually be used for teachers to rent. It became part of the school's recruitment efforts that the teachers would be able to obtain affordable housing at a reasonable distance from the school. Notice that this is not about contiguous property as the other examples are. Foresight considers property from a variety of different angles.

There is also the Garden of Eden consideration. Our children live with a nature deficit. Not only do many of our children live in geographic areas that are largely concrete, even if they have access to many green spaces or if they live in a more rural setting, current parenting practices do not allow them to explore at will, discovering and imagining within a setting akin to God's original intent in the Garden. Genesis tells us that even God walked in the Garden when it wasn't too hot (the cool of the day) and enjoyed the goodness God had made (saw that it was good). It is an obvious good that we should give our children in their education if at all possible. Particularly as your school expands its buildings and covers nature with turf fields and manicured gardens, you should also consider what it means to be part of the Garden.

The creation of the Property Acquisition Plan is the job of the Building and Grounds Committee. They should examine:

- the current needs of the school,
- consider the strategic needs of the school as the Board's Strategic Plan might suggest, and in particular the impact of building plans on the school's Garden aspect
- carry out a review of the real estate trends in the local area
- look at regional trends
- obtain demographic trend information
- understand the fiscal trends, interest rate environment etc.
- recommend, as appropriate, reserves accumulation beyond the KPI 3 months to ensure the school is in good position to take advantage of opportunity

There may well be other considerations based on insights that the administration and Board has. Present the PAP to the Board for approval and review it every five years.

Land matters.

Never sell your land. We had never seen a situation where the sale of land was the best strategic decision. Sometimes, land is sold because of fiscal emergency. Clearly, foresight should avoid such situations. Sometimes, land is sold because it seems that the school has plenty and it is a good way to obtain cash for some other worthy objective. Over a 100 year timeline, it is hard to imagine that being true.

The beauty of your property is a significant way in which your students experience aesthetic beauty, the Garden of Eden, educational opportunity. Your Property Acquisition Plan is the only document the Board has that looks so far into the future. For that reason, it is often ignored (it's too far away). Take it deadly seriously. Your great great great grandchild will be grateful.

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