

## **EASTON LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE PRESENTATION CLOSING COMMENTS**

Thanks are owed to the Long Range Planning Committee – and especially to Regina Bobroske who led the discussion and framed its results. Tonight’s presentation highlights the quality of the committee’s discussion. It also makes clear its complexity: in both Easton and Redding, the public schools compete with open space, natural beauty and proximity to the Merritt as community anchors. For years, the public schools served a stable or a rising number of students, and were organized accordingly. Even over the past several years, existing arrangements were sufficiently elastic to withstand the student population lost since the high water enrollment of 2007-2008.

Among other things, "existing arrangements" include

- # of school employees

- # of school employment categories

- # of school busses

- # of schools

- # of members on the BOE

- # of BOEs in ER9

In addition to these numbers, other “existing arrangements” include:

- School schedules

- Start and end times

- Positive growth budgets

- DRG A membership

- A shared central office

- A shared high school

Enrollment declines are predicted to continue to a point that likely will exhaust the elasticity of existing arrangements. Nonetheless, many of the existing arrangements have some shelf-life remaining. Their expiration date is not tomorrow. But “not tomorrow” is “not forever.” I guesstimate that significant redesign will be needed within five years. Via tonight’s report, the first re-design steps have been taken. The pace needs to be maintained and, in due time, quickened.

In addition to its substantive conclusions, the Long Range Planning Committee is important as an example of a community's better nature applied to a wicked problem.

"A **wicked problem** is a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. The use of term "wicked" denotes resistance to resolution, rather than evil."

By "better nature," I am referring to organized thinking married to a shared regard for the community's best interests.

I hope that this marriage endures. All of those elements --- organized thought, shared regard, a community's best interests --- will be needed to move the discussion forward to a successful conclusion. Otherwise, the discussion stalls.

Worse than a stalled discussion is a discussion derailed by private motive, lack of will, and/or absence of imagination. Change in some form *will* occur. A derailed discussion opens the door to unplanned or ill-designed change. The nature of the problem courts the risk of such derailment. But the saving grace is the nature of this community: I'm confident that the many smart, accomplished, and committed citizens who live here will do what is needed to safeguard quality public education in Easton and Redding.

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