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School District Board of Education Meeting – Sept 20

Originally Published: October 3, 2016

Many thanks to Doug Blakeney for attending the Board of Education Public Board Meeting held on September 20th. School Board Documents associated with the meeting (Agenda, Board Package, Draft Summary of Motions) can be found [here](#).

Of special interest to the Blueridge Community is the Draft [5-Year Capital Plan 2016/17](#) which was approved for submission to the Ministry. The Plan highlighted the following funding requests: Seismic Mitigation Programs, Expansion Projects, Replacement Projects* (affects Blueridge Elementary), Building Envelope Projects, School Enhancement Projects, Carbon Neutral Capital Projects, and Bus Replacement Programs.

Of concern to our Community is Project Priority #1 on the [Replacement Projects](#) list:

- Priority Based primarily on Facility condition, with consideration to future enrolment pressures

Project Priority	Facility Name	Project Timing	Project Description	Preliminary Estimate
1	Seymour Heights / Blueridge	2018/19	Replace one school with expanded 60 K / 425	\$ 15,234,815
2	Lynnmour	2019/20	Replace with expanded 60 K / 400	\$ 14,886,181
3	Queensbury	2020/21	Replace with expanded 60 K / 400	\$ 15,327,924
4	Larson	2020/21	Replace with expanded 60 K / 475	\$ 16,984,835
5	Brooksbank	2021/22	Replace with 60 K / 400	TBD
6	Ross Road	6 - 10 Years	Replace with expanded 60 K / 600	TBD

SD44 Draft 5-year Capital Plan 2016/2017

Doug noted that the School Trustees at the meeting were not all in agreement with the priorities in the Capital Plan. Larson and Ross Road Elementary Schools (currently #4 and #6 on the Replacement Projects priority list) are significantly overpopulated and in real need of more facility space. There was also serious discussion regarding Priority #1 and #2 under the [Expansion](#) Projects list regarding future planning for the Lower Lonsdale neighbourhood where there is a growing need for an elementary school (which would require land and money for buildings).

Doug spoke during the “Public Comment” portion of the meeting and made the following points:

1. The funding request approved earlier in the meeting for submission to the Ministry is significantly too low
 - Blueridge Elementary student population is currently 352 students, an increase of 30% over the last 5 years.
 - Adding to an estimated 275 students at Seymour Heights, the current # of students in both schools is roughly 625.
 - The Capital Plan approved for submission to the Ministry is only budgeted to build a school for 425 students at Seymour Heights.
2. SD44 has run surpluses for at least the last 5 years so does not appear to be in need of operating savings that the combined schools would supposedly provide.
3. School Trustees themselves had expressed concerns about other priorities lower down on the Replacement Projects list (Larson and Ross Road); schools which they stated are “*bursting at the seams*”.

Doug asked if priorities in the Plan can change over time as new information becomes available. The Board confirmed that priorities can shift.

Doug also asked the Board about Seismic upgrades (#1: Handsworth Secondary – \$43M) vs School replacements (#1: Seymour Heights / Blueridge \$15M) and which would likely have the highest priority? The Board suggested that the Ministry has been placing a higher emphasis on seismic upgrades.

The overall impression from the meeting was that nothing will likely happen in the near future regarding Seymour/Blueridge – even if funding were approved, it would be many years before a new school would be ready. 2017 is also an election year so there may also be a change in government coming. The Capital Plan priorities may also change in the future. What IS important (and this was strongly emphasized to Doug after the meeting by Trustee Barry Forward, who is the Blueridge / Seymour Heights School Liason) is for the community to continue to have a presence at upcoming meetings and continue to lobby to keep Blueridge Elementary open as long as possible.

Would you be able to attend a School Board meeting? We’d like to keep track of who can attend, please take a moment to fill out this [Doodle Poll](#) [link no longer valid] and indicate which meeting (in 2016) you can attend. A new poll for 2017 will go out nearer December.

Interested in finding out more about the Public Lands Taskforce? Join our [mailing list](#) [link no longer valid]! or contact us at info@blueridgeca.org.

For some background on this issue please read these [previous](#) [link no longer valid - see archive on the School tab of the [Resources page](#) of the BCA website] posts.