

HENRY HUDSON PAC MEETING

Date & Time: March 13, 2013 6:30 pm

Location: Henry Hudson Library

In attendance: Parents (approximately 30), Principal Adams, Patti Bacchus, Chair, Vancouver Board of Education. A full list of attendees is available from the PAC Chair upon request. For privacy reasons, a full list is not posted on the web site.

1. Approval of Minutes.

A motion to approve the minutes from the February 2013 PAC meeting was moved by Mitch and seconded by Andrea. Motion passed.
2. PAC Chair Report – Robert
 - a. French Immersion Field Trip Update (Alan). French exchange planning could make one scared. The key lies in being prepared.
 - b. Grade 7 Grad Committee. A letter went out to the Grade 7 parents from the PAC Chair requesting that some parents step forward to form a grad committee to plan grad events. Such a committee appears to be forming now. The PAC has \$300 slated for a grad event.
3. PAC Secretary Report – Christine
 - a. Bike to School Week is coming up, May 27-31. More information will be forthcoming.
 - b. There is now a PAC representative for the choir (Heather) whose task it is to help facilitate communications among the choir director, the choir parents and the PAC. She will work with the choir parents and the choir director to come to financial decisions when it comes to choir funds that are held by the PAC. However, choir expenditures of more than \$150 will be put to vote at a PAC meeting.
 - c. Chantal is working on having a Kid-Proof course put on here at the school, but is still figuring out the cost of renting the library and the ultimate cost to the students.
4. PAC Treasurer Report – Dana
 - a. Hot Lunch. Dana reported on hot lunch revenues.

5. Principal's Report – Mr. Adams

- a. The population of the school will be in the high 360's in the 2013/14 school year. There has been a lot of kindergarten registration. There is no more room in the English stream.
- b. Mr. Adams expressed thanks for the great performance of The Wizard of Oz.
- c. Report cards will be going home this Friday, March 15 (last day of school before spring break).
- d. School will be back in session after spring break and district closure on Tuesday, April 2.
- e. Shuttle Sport International will be running badminton in the P.E. classes the first 2 weeks after spring break.
- f. The school talent show will take place April 23.

6. Teachers' Report – none

7. SPC Report – Victoria & Mitch – Nothing new to report; next meeting taking place later this spring.

8. Members-at-Large Reports

a. Playground and Accidental Fundraising Committee (Beth).

- i. Playground: The group thanked and recognized Gary for project managing the playground replacement project for the past several years. The group is now at about step 15 in the process. The group has been given a quote from VSB regarding installation and is in the process of negotiating with them on what the quote means. The group has also received an updated quote from the playground supplier as well.

- ii. Fundraising: The direct parent request fundraiser is ongoing, please get donations in. To date, about \$9300 has been donated. The signs on the playground structure have a made a difference. We will ask permission to put flyers on the school doors as well. The current request is for \$30,000. We have met with Lululemon and can report that they have a strong interest in partnering with the school on a long-term basis. We discussed fundraising with them and also community work with the school, community gardens, landscaping, how to fundraise within them from their employees. After Easter will be the final push to get the word out for the direct donation campaign. We are at about 20% participation, we want to get up to 100% participation so it's the whole community working on a common problem.
 - b. Earthquake Readiness (Principal Adams). Comfort kits have been collected from the families. There was not a bad return; about 50-60% of kids now have kits out in the shed and ready to go. The kits will be returned near the end of the school year.
 - c. Hudson choir (Catherine and Heather). There was a little concert this afternoon for the parents and the students did a great job. The choir has grown from 20 kids to 50 now, but the younger students are not as capable as the older students, so Catherine is proposing for September to have a junior and a senior choir. Heather is now the point person between the choir and the PAC. Is an hour too long for the littlest ones to have choir practice, asks Beth? Catherine says, yes, for some of them. Catherine mentioned that she does a recess rehearsal time for the younger students at another school. This works well, except it can limit the number of songs in the younger students' repertoire, as recess once a week does not provide much time to learn new lyrics, especially for children who cannot yet read. Keep in mind that the choir's songs are in English and French. Catherine also reported that the chamber choir tried to do a field trip performance to the seniors' hospital at Cornwall & Balsam, but the hospital phoned at the last minute that they had flu at the hospital and didn't want the students to come.
9. Guest Speaker, Patti Bacchus, Chair, Vancouver Board of Education.
- a. How Does the Seismic Upgrade Process Work for Hudson?
- As a parent herself, Ms. Bacchus started asking about seismic upgrading in 1999 at her kids' school (Queen Mary). At that time she was told many schools had been upgraded, in that bookcases and the like had been bolted to the walls. A study that

had been done in the mid-1980s did identify seismic issues at many schools. But at that time, the government would only upgrade schools if renovations were being done at schools. Van Tech students created an ad of a little girl writing her will before going to school... their lobby to get Van Tech upgraded eventually succeeded. An organization called Families for School Seismic Safety was started. Then, in 2005, Gordon Campbell announced that all schools would be upgraded by 2020 and \$1.5 billion was committed to this feat. The government listed a number of fast-track schools to be done by 2008, including Queen Mary and Strathcona, but none of the schools on that list have been started on. Van Tech did get done (a \$50 million project), but Ms. Bacchus says it was because the students themselves spoke out. The process is that the VSB submits capital plan of which schools to upgrade to the Ministry of Education. Looking at how long these projects are taking, it is very hit and miss; there is no consistent pattern of government approval to go ahead with each school. We need \$1 billion to complete them all. We now have approval for Queen Mary, Kits Secondary, and General Gordon, and Strathcona is almost there. Once the school receives project approval, we know we will get the rest of the money. There has never been this level of construction before, but there are almost 50 schools left to go. By the time these schools are done, our kids will be grown up. The VSB came up with an ambitious capital plan containing a list of schools to be upgraded by 2020, but in order for this to occur, all those schools will have to be approved within the next 5 years. Hudson is on this VSB list and is considered high risk. The order of which schools to upgrade is established by a calculation of square footage of high risk spaces, and how many people use those spaces. Secondary schools have more people in them, so they get ranked higher. There is presently a lot of negotiation regarding this capital plan between the VSB and the MoEd. NDP government in the 1990s had much more capital spending, but we don't now. On the capital submission, Hudson is at year 4 of the plan. If all the projects were approved, we at Hudson would be in the design phase by 2015, and construction would take place in 2016-2018. Hudson is not a highly ranked heritage building, which makes it simpler. Probably they will prefer to build a new building instead of fixing this one up, which brings down operating costs.

What can we do to influence this process? Make this an election issue as much as possible. Good arguments beyond making kids safe: capital money creates jobs, construction jobs, in a relatively slow time. Squeaking wheels get funded, so write lots of letters to MLAs so they know it's a priority. Talk to nominated candidates as the incumbent in this district is not re-running. And party leaders. Once a school reaches a certain level of approval, you get seismic committees with staff, parents,

and sometimes students. Also a series of open houses will be held concerning the preferred concept.

Questions from parents:

- i. These projects sometimes get stuck, despite government announcements. What is the root cause of slow-down?

Answer: competing priorities for Treasury money: they need to re-build hospitals, fix roads, build a subway line, competitions among MLAs for their ridings. Treasury Board is its own entity. Difficult decisions, school board has to do it too. People don't want to pay more taxes, but they want the stuff. Could write a letter as the PAC and get responses from candidates that would put up on website for example. If MLAs don't hear from people that this is a priority, it won't seem like one.

- ii. Best guess as to which year this will happen? What happens to the students during the upgrade?

Answer: Hard to say when, funds have been flowing and projects being approved more often recently. She does think it is a priority for government, as it is infrastructure. As for what happens to the students, once we have project approval we develop a plan. Options include staying on site (using portables at one end of the property and then build on the other part of the property) then take the old school down/ move whole school off site to a swing space. Maybe will get another swing space site. Usually construction takes 2 years from the time when you have to get the kids out of the way; nice when can get it done on-site. But moving to portables on-site has safety and traffic and play-space issues. Engineers and architects will do proposals. Will set up bussing program for transportation to a swing site if necessary. VSB plan this site: construction 2016-2018.

- iii. Are contracts tendered?

Answer: Usually, projects are managed through VSB. Kitsilano Secondary has been delayed because it is such a large project, want to design/build to

control costs and put risk of overages onto the contractors. There is a list of firms that have been pre-qualified, so the VSB goes to that list.

- iv. If new building, would childcare space be considered?

Answer: This is a contentious issue. The government doesn't necessarily replicate your building, it is a formula based on enrollment. But the new schools were being designed much smaller than the old ones. The government announced in 2008 that it would pilot neighbourhood centres of learning to get extra space for community use; has to be available for non-school use, but this can include childcare space.

- v. What about using extra rental space for other purposes e.g. retail, office, accommodations. Has this been done?

Answer: School board office sits above commercial space, but done in private partnership with Bentall. VSB has been looking at whether this is feasible on some of the bigger sites. Some larger sites are underutilized and have looked at whether they can include office or residential buildings on site. Sexsmith school: had to keep heritage building but built new school at the other end, now looking for alternative uses for the old building, at least revenue-neutral. There is interest in doing more creative use, especially on larger sites than this one. VSB has also had conversations with Park Board on multi-use of space. E.g., Elsie Roy used City money to upgrade part of school to meet childcare licensing space to use classrooms for before and after school care. Upgrades give us a chance to design this kind of thing into buildings.

- b. Playground equipment replacement. Why wasn't this planned for, to have budgeted 15 years ago for playground replacement?

Answer: There has never been funding for playgrounds in any systematic way. They've done grants here and there of different kinds, but not stable funding from government. In theory we can fund them through the school boards out of facilities grants, but already we are barely holding buildings together on this budget. For

instance, we are on a 40-year painting cycle for the schools. School board has never funded playgrounds. There has always been some outside funding source.

- i. If Lululemon became a major contributor to our community, are there restrictions on their involvement?

Answer: Yes, a detailed commercialization in schools policy is in place, which came out of how Home Depot built a playground in North Van and kids went home wearing Home Depot t-shirts. Being schools, kids have difficult time separating advertising from fact and are very vulnerable to marketing. There is an implied endorsement that could come through your school. So we need to be really careful about anything that could be construed as marketing to kids. For example, we need to say that we appreciate your generosity, but the kids won't wear the shirts or sing the songs. VSB is fending off the logo-laden stuff on a weekly basis. Administrators know how this works and provide advice. Most donors understand this. Beth: Lululemon does understand and prefers not to be recognized in this way.

- ii. We have a competitive bid for the playground structure, but we can't get a competitive bid for installation because it must be done by VSB staff. Why is this the case?

Answer: To the union, this would be considered contracting out, because installation is considered their work. There are also safety issues. Installation must be done by school district staff. Site preparation and installation isn't cheap; some cities kick in part of it, e.g. Delta, in recognition that communities use these playgrounds as well. What can be done by volunteers? Well, City staff would have to come out and prepare it all, and then they would have to provide supervision and check it afterwards, but this can happen sometimes.

- iii. Has the City considered doing partnerships like infrastructure works program?

Answer: From what Ms. Bacchus has been told, the Federal government will tell us that this is a provincial responsibility. It is challenging enough already

with VSB, City, and Province involved; not sure if including the federal level would be helpful.

- c. The recent DPAC petition asked for a better funding model for schools. In it, it said, major cost is labour (teachers), provincially negotiated. The Province used to pay benefits, and not send them down to the school board level. Why are there more labour-related costs to the school board without matching funds?

Answer: It used to be the school board who had to levy taxes. Now all the taxes including school taxes collected by the City go to Victoria for redistribution. There is more funding for fewer kids, but 92% of the funds goes to salaries and benefits, and most of those contracts are tied to provincial negotiations. In the past when the Province has agreed to increases, some were covered and some were not. One year, the Province gave teachers a raise but gave no more money for school boards, and school board budgets must be balanced. Now the school board has to pay pension funds, as well as all the insurance premiums. All kinds of gaps were created. We are now looking at a \$10 million gap, and we have to make it up through parking, international students, rentals, but we are limited as to what can be done to make money, so there ends up being reductions. Proposals on how to balance this budget will come out in April; there will be a series of public meetings to debate these measures. This is not timed by provincial election, it's always in April, so the budget for the following year will be in place before the end of the school year.

- i. Could facilities grant money get offset onto school boards, making seismic upgrading go even later?

Answer: One year, the VSB got a memo in August saying that the money wasn't coming even though it had already been spent by school boards in the summer doing upgrades. It needs to be a relationship of trust, but we get surprise announcements from government. Seem to have not enough discretion over your budget.

- ii. Is the VSB at arm's length from the government? You seem not to have enough discretion over your budget.

Answer: We are a creature of the School Act and can be fired by the Minister. E.g., right now no school board in Cowichan. The power of school boards has been diminished; trying to communicate with people the conditions under which they make difficult choices. Advocacy role. Fewer people have kids in school system now than ever before, so as a polling issue education doesn't come up high...seniors vote, young parents not so much. We have to raise our voices and convince of value of public education not just to people with kids in the system. The City hands school taxes directly to the Province.

- d. Is it useful to directly contact the City regarding seismic upgrades for funding in addition?

Answer: out of their jurisdiction, they don't have it either. They are supportive in terms of advocacy. Builders have wanted to put houses on this site in exchange for building a school; even on a 99-year lease you're handing over your lands to a private entity. Government does see it as their responsibility to fund upgrades. May make more sense to keep heat on government and we have responsibility as stewards of these open spaces.

- e. Can we get Park Board money for this site? How can we find out?

Answer: Ms. Bacchus believes it is School Board land, not Parks Board land.

- f. Regarding school security, will there be any imminent changes to security policies?

Answer: Sandy Hook WAS a locked school with a security guard. Security varies from school to school, most are old with multiple access points. Some schools lock some doors. The schools work closely with Vancouver police. The Vancouver police don't like us locking doors. Sometimes the police get reports of intruders, police are then in there in minutes, through all the doors, sweeping quietly through the school. You don't want locked doors in fire, earthquake situations. Plus, locked doors can create a sense of anxiety in kids. The more open and welcoming a school is, the more parents, adults, and people who know who belongs, the more relationships and sense of community there is in a school, the more likely the school will keep safe. Schools in Vancouver have very good safety record. Very few lockdowns, most

threats reported by kids coming forward, knowing who to come forward to, and threat averted. Most incidents are created by people already known to school, people who would be in that school anyway. We really don't have issues of strangers coming to schools to harm anyone. Be afraid of the cars, of children becoming depressed and suicidal, those are the real dangers.

g. How do private schools get their funding?

Answer: They don't get capital funding. If they charge more than what we would fund per student, they get 35% grant; those who don't (e.g., faith schools) get 50% grant. Public education: some kids are very expensive to educate, but we take everybody, so our overall costs are more than schools that can have selected intake.

Many thanks to Patti Bacchus!

10. Next Meeting – Wednesday, April 10, tentatively.
11. Adjournment – A motion to adjourn the meeting was moved by Mitch and seconded by Jerry. Motion passed.