



December 2, 2007

Hello everyone!

Here is an update on new developments concerning the fate of Ridgeway Elementary School.

The Ridgeway Heritage Committee met Nov. 28 with the representatives of North Vancouver School District, their architects Downs/Archambault, and the City of North Vancouver's planning department. The School District called the meeting to answer any questions that arose from their earlier presentation of revised costings. The architect also gave a detailed presentation of their work to date.

As a reminder, the main change was that the School District has modified its two renovation options -- Option 1 (retention of the 1911 and 1926 wings) and Option 2 (retention of the 1911 core) -- to include related proposals (1A and 2A) that would rebuild the interior, while preserving and restoring the exterior. It says this move was prompted by cost considerations, particularly the poor quality of concrete pillars and horizontal beams that need to be placed at each floor level.

Clarifying this approach, the architect stated that, as the "A" options concern concrete slabs in the structure, there would be little or no discernible difference in the end result. Their question: to what extent is it a priority from a heritage perspective to retain all the original concrete structure? Our response was that full retention (Option 1) is preferable, but if the alternative route allows the School District to retain the full school, with wings, Option 1A could be an acceptable compromise.

At this stage, however, most work seems to have gone into exterior plans for Option 2, with only outline proposals for the interior under Options 1 and 2, or the exterior under Option 1.

The architect has clearly made some effort to follow procedures for heritage preservation, including both Parks Canada and US guidelines. Their approach for the exterior reflected this. We still have concerns about plans for the interior, and the extent to which heritage aspects will be maintained, and will continue to press this point. We were assured that the rooms would still be large, with high ceilings and original windows, but that other aspects like staircases may not be priorities -- all depending on how much money they have to work with. We also stressed the value of the refuge. Although retention in its current location may not be possible, the School District and its architect were open to an alternative site.

There had been some concerns about the bell tower, given references in the earlier presentation to reconstruction. The architect stressed that preservation of the original tower is preferable (and cheaper), but that replacement was included in the costing as a "worst-case" scenario -- for example if the structure has deteriorated such that it falls apart when removed to allow the main structural work. The new bell would be installed during the renovation.

The School District staff promised to look into suggestions that they contact APEGBC (Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC) with regard to bridging guidelines for seismic upgrades for possible cost savings, but they do not expect this to result in any major changes to the various options.

As you may recall, significant funding for heritage preservation work at both Ridgeway and Queen Mary would be created by a City of North Vancouver proposal to allow density transfers related to developments of the School District's Lonsdale and partial Queen Mary sites. The amount depends partly on what is approved by City Council, partly on when and how density is sold. It is a complex proposal, but basically some funds would be created immediately from actual development work on the two sites, with another large chunk created when the School District sells theoretical density rights from the rest of the Queen Mary site.

The School District provisionally agreed to proceed with Option 1/1A as its preferred option for now, partly because the difference between Options 1 and 2 has narrowed considerably in their revised costings. However, it says an actual decision would depend on how much funding is available.

What happens next?

The School District proceeds with a report to the Ministry of Education.

Council considers the development proposals in the new year, with public consultation.

The School District and its architect prepare detailed designs once the course is decided and funding is in place.

If all goes to plan, work could start in mid-2009, taking two years.

The Ridgeway Heritage Committee will respond formally with our position, and then pick up the issue in the new year, making representation at the public consultation process. We will keep you posted.

Our position is as follows, but please let us know if you have any comments:

- We welcome the positive stance of the School District and its architect toward retention of Ridgeway's historic school building and its sympathetic approach toward its heritage values.
- Option 1 (restoration of the 1911 and 1926 building) remains our preferred route.
- We would consider Option 1A (interior reconstruction in the 1911 and 1926 core) as a compromise, to reduce costs, as long as interior work is sympathetic to the school's heritage.

- We commend the effort that has clearly gone into designing Options 2 and 2A in a sympathetic manner. However, we do not regard Options 2 and 2A as acceptable, given widespread support in the community for retention of the 1926 wings.
- We are concerned that options for Ridgeway would be left undecided while Council considers development proposals for the Lonsdale and Queen Mary sites. We believe clarification and confirmation of the School District's approach is essential before Council approves its incentives for the Lonsdale and Queen Mary sites. We do not believe Council should approve the development package without such a firm commitment. Legal protection of the Ridgeway and Queen Mary buildings should also form part of that package, as previously stated by the committee.
- We suggest that the School District and its architect proceed with further work on designs for Option 1 and the interior, to match the scale of work undertaken for Option 2. As stated, we believe interior work should preserve heritage aspects wherever possible.
- We propose that a recognized heritage specialist be retained as a consultant for advice and monitoring on exterior and interior designs.

Yours,
The Ridgeway Heritage Committee