

**Vancouver School Board
Facilities Planning Committee
March 13, 2019**

Delegation: Point Grey Secondary School PAC

Re: Long Range Facilities Plan

Speaker: Deborah Stern Silver (DPAC representative for Point Grey)

Introduction

- Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.
- I'm Deborah Stern Silver. I am the DPAC representative from Point Grey, and I have two children: one in Gr. 8 and one in Gr. 5 (French Immersion).
- With me here are Point Grey PAC leaders, as well as several of our parents.
- Our purpose:
 1. To explain what makes the Point Grey community unique
 2. To assess the status of our seismic program
 3. To seek clarity on the possibilities for our school, and to see how we can effectively collaborate with you on options for a way forward.
- Since the LRFP was released, we've held 3 well-attended parent meetings, reaching more than 150 people from the Main and Mini School, as well as feeder schools. We have an overall consensus on our top priorities, reflected in this statement:

We are committed parents who will work with you to get our children into a safe school that fosters learning and preserves our community.

I. Highlights of Point Grey:

1. Tradition of excellence

98% graduation rate: (70% of students go directly to university, 20% to other post-secondary programs, 10% take gap year or go into workforce.)

2. Visibility and community partnerships/service

- Most obvious way Point Grey is visible in the community: our building itself
 - Only Class A Heritage rating. It not only defines Kerrisdale with its distinctive architecture, but is a historic city landmark.
 - Point Grey will mark 100 years of educating Vancouver students, and is already looking toward 2029 Centennial.
 - Artificial turf field: funded jointly by Point Grey and Parks Board. One of only turf fields on West side, and all-weather. Regularly hosts games/practices by Point Grey/outside schools.
 - Auditorium is a *community resource and revenue generator*. One of more popular filming locations in Vancouver, with “Riverdale” filming recently (media/local attention). Often rented by outside groups for concerts/shows/ events (VPD-led self-defense workshop for students/community.)
- Strong sense of community and service
- At least half of student clubs focused on philanthropy. Point Grey won “Canley Cup” student district food drive for 6 of 7 years. Students collected more than 25,000 items (2018).
- Community-building: We host one of few remaining annual Gr. 8 camps.
- A strong sense of collegiality among teachers, some there for decades.

3. Point Grey Mini School

- One of first mini schools in Vancouver
- A diverse program that draws from elementary schools throughout the district (at least 15 schools, often in 20s)
- Services motivated kids with unique needs, both academic and social. These children often don’t flourish in a traditional classroom. But they thrive with this enriched, challenging course of study in a cohesive setting. Intellectual debate and disagreement is both normal and expected.

- Mini students strongly involved in service and leadership positions throughout larger Point Grey community. In 2018 Point Grey awards, Mini School students received:
 - More than 1/2 of Awards of Distinction
 - 1/3 of Individual Achievement Awards
 - More than 1/2 of academic scholarships and merit awards (these recognize service to school and/or community)

4. Music program

- 40% of our students participate in music program (50% of Gr. 8 class). One of highest participation rates in city, if not the highest.
- Program developed over more than 25 years and draws students to the school. With support from parents, teachers and students, program has thrived despite budget cuts.
- Point Grey hosts annual district jazz program and has award-winning concert and jazz bands, strings, and choirs that perform locally and internationally.
- The Ministry isn't dedicating resources to music and art. But note:
 - *The link between math/music, and between science/art, is proven research. Students who participate in music and art programs perform better academically, improve cognitive abilities, and develop stronger collaboration, empathy and listening skills (goals of new curriculum).*

5. Other

- Point Grey hosts 3 District special needs programs, including academic and life skills. Creating a sensory room.
- Summer School centre: always full
- Largest number of international students, with highest retention rate
- Our Chinese Parents committee hosts Lunar New Year Celebration and Lion Dance for both Point Grey and Quilchena, next-door feeder school
- *Sustainability* emphasis; many students commute by foot or bike.

II. **Seismic upgrade process:**

1. In 2004, the VSB released a list of 60 schools at significant seismic risk. Among those, Point Grey was designated a high priority for seismic upgrade.

2. In an April 2015 update on the Seismic Mitigation Program, the VSB gave highest priority to 8 of these schools, Point Grey among them, and moved us in the Project Definition Report (PDR) phase. This phase was forecast to take 6-12 months. It is 4 years later.
3. The latest information we have from last week's DPAC meeting, from Mr. Dawson: Point Grey is "stuck" in the PDR phase. We understand from Mr. Green there has been a recommendation to update that PDR. We'd like to understand what that means, what the timeline is, and how as parents we can work with you to move this process along.
4. We do understand that you (Trustees and VSB staff) are in a difficult position, having to balance answering to the Ministry and being accountable to the parents. Still:

Every year the VSB puts off a decision on moving ahead is another year our children – and thousands more throughout Vancouver – are in unsafe schools.

5. We've been here before: I was on the parent team that worked with several of you, over many years, to help get L'École Bilingue into a safe school. We did it! We can do this, too.

III. Seeking clarity

1. Confusion over the LRFP
 - Confusion/concern among parents. Tremendous anxiety among students, who are terrified that their communities and networks will be torn apart.
 - Not just Point Grey – same reactions from many parents and students at other schools on the list for potential consolidation or closure.
 - Families make decisions on secondary school on a long-term basis. Parents don't know if they should keep their kids enrolled or consider moving, which would decrease enrolment.
 - There are lots of rumours, due to the way in which this report was rolled out (without clear explanation).
 - Media coverage has been misleading and contradictory; reporters don't understand it, either. This has created a news vacuum.
2. Lack of transparency, Disconnect with families
 - Compressed timeline, with little opportunity for public consultation.

- We heard at last week’s DPAC meeting about how the VSB has the opportunity to build “the best schools in Canada.” But **100% of parents who shared their opinions with us prioritize safety and quality of teaching and education over having “the best” schools.**
- As a parent and a taxpayer: this opaque process, with an uncertain timeline, is frustrating.
- Unfortunate that the Ministry pits schools and programs against each other with this process.
- All of this leads to a lack of trust.

3. Ideas for solutions

- Right now, the conversation between the VSB and families is framed around pros and cons of the report’s recommendations, particularly about school consolidation.
- Back up a bit! Engage school communities and other stakeholders (City, neighbourhood associations, others) as partners.
- More information will help parents respond effectively to the LRFP. For instance: Can you give us the 5 most likely possibilities for our school?
- The VSB has significant community assets. How do we optimize use of these facilities? Maybe the city will inject capital to help solve this, and gain resources for common use in the process. Win-win.
- Look at community impact: Point Grey, Quilchena Elementary, track/turf field, Kerrisdale Arena – These are operated by different groups, but to the community, it’s kind of a campus. Take out the secondary school, and it tears out the heart of the community.

Conclusion:

We’ve been through this. We understand there are hard decisions about costs to upgrade vs. build new schools, Heritage status, enrolment projections, etc.

Engage us in that process so we can discuss the pros and cons of various options? *What makes sense for the people inside the buildings?*

There are options. Partner with us, and we’ll try to bridge any impasse to get to a planning solution that works for everyone.

Our families are engaged, creative advocates. We can help you come up with possibilities that will further our collective goal: getting our students, teachers and administrators into safe schools that provide an excellent education.