

General Gordon Seismic Mitigation Process FAQ

Thanks to the efforts of The Families for School Seismic Safety (FSSS), the provincial government has undertaken the immensely important job of making our schools safe in the event of an earthquake. In many cases, the Seismic Mitigation Program cost factors are resulting in demolition and the building of new replacement schools (e.g., Dickens, Sexsmith). In some cases, costs dictate upgrading existing schools (e.g., Shaughnessy, Kerrisdale). The safety goals of the Program are being met, but current Ministry of Education standards for what constitutes an 'adequate' school mean that the new schools that have come out of the Program are less adequate facilities than we started with. Replacement schools are typically 2/3 as large as the schools they replace but have the same number of students, with cramped halls, lower ceilings, and the loss of after school care, music, auditoriums, and covered play areas. Replacement projects do generally maintain the same number of classrooms. The following Q&A is a summary of what we have learned.

1. What is the current proposal from the Vancouver School Board (VSB)?

To demolish General Gordon and replace it with a school 2/3 the size. Although the current proposal preserves classroom spaces, multipurpose space such as our lunchroom and basement is lost. Dickens Elementary (which received extra money we have been told is not available to us) created a wide hallway for use as a lunchroom by reducing classroom size and hallway width. Also not funded are outdoor covered play areas, a stage in the gym, a music room, and a playground.

2. What about childcare?

The proposed school does not have a JKC space. The VSB has offered to not demolish the current lunchroom; we would have to finance the renovation, at an estimated cost of \$600,000, translating to an *increase* in fees of about \$220/month per child. That would provide space for only half the enrolled students, not including the wait list.

3. Are there other options on the table?

No. The VSB originally presented three ways to achieve seismic safety at Gordon: a replacement school, a renovated old school, and a hybrid. One variation on the renovation plan that was not presented by the VSB called for replacing, rather than upgrading, the gym. The VSB offered us only the replacement school solution. There was almost no public consultation and the school community was not included in the decision-making.

4. Why was this particular replacement school chosen by the VSB?

It was presented as the least expensive, the safest, and the greenest option. All three of these claims can be contested with some investigation. There are other unwritten factors at work. The VSB is under pressure from the province to shed 'excess' square footage to meet provincial targets, and new smaller buildings help achieve that goal. New buildings also reduce maintenance costs in the short term.

5. What about the costs?

In the original VSB presentation, the cost of building a 3200 SM replacement school was estimated at \$12.5 M; the cost of a full seismic upgrade of the 4900 SM existing building was estimated at \$16.2 M (including the seismic upgrading of the existing gym). The VSB used these figures as the basis for its decision to approve the building of the "replacement" school. The new school (as described above in Number 1), with an estimated cost of \$12.5 M, is currently the only option contemplated by the VSB. An analysis of the Feasibility Report suggests that we could build a case that the costs of building a more adequate new school would be roughly equal to the costs of a renovation. The Feasibility Study July report states that a lower-cost option would be to renovate the classrooms but replace the gym. This option would be roughly equivalent to the cost of a replacement school enhanced to come closer to Gordon today - approximately \$15 M in either case. However, neither of these calculations is "on the table" with the VSB at the present time. To achieve either scenario, would require a significant change in direction from the VSB. The full analysis can be found on the General Gordon website.

6. What about safety?

The differences between safety requirements for new schools and renovated schools are minimal compared to the huge gains resulting from the mitigation program. Post-disaster survivability is proposed only for the replacement gym (with either the replacement school or the upgraded school). A detailed explanation of safety issues is on the website.

7. What about environmental considerations?

Opportunities for green initiatives exist for both old and new buildings. Both can meet LEED Gold standards. The current proposal for the replacement school does not include funding for it to be a 'green' school. Gordon now uses less energy per square foot than the latest green schools. The design life cycle of the province's new schools is 20 years. There is a huge carbon spike with demolition and construction - a well-built green school would need to last longer than 20 years to reclaim that loss.

8. Wouldn't a renovation involve a lot of disturbance (dust, noise) to our kids' education?

It doesn't have to. There's enough room on our site to set up enough portables to have everyone out of the building while renovations proceed.

9. Is the same thing happening to other schools?

Yes, schools across the province have been identified as requiring seismic upgrade. VSB Trustee Ken Denike has stated that "funding rules could force the demolition of 35 schools....." in Vancouver. Kitsilano High is slated for demolition, and its auditorium will not be replaced under the current plans. 64 schools across this city face a similar fate.

10. Will we go to the "end of the line" if we don't accept what's on offer now?

No, the VSB says we must be dealt with in order of risk. General Gordon is in the second round of funding, which includes Kitchener, Secord, Trafalgar, Moberly, Sexsmith, Douglas, L'Ecole Bilingue and Kits High.

11. What is being done to improve our options?

Concerned parents across the city are talking to governmental bodies involved (the VSB, the Trustees, the City, Gordon Campbell's office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Child and Family Services, the Ministry of Finance, their MLAs) in order to better understand the seismic mitigation process and to seek funding to improve the proposed schools. One approach being pursued is to change the rules of the seismic process at the provincial level so the VSB can 1) enact a thorough public consultation process; and 2) get sufficient funding for adequate schools. Another avenue of recourse is an attempt to get the Ministries that oversee services provided by schools (e.g., child care by the Ministry of Child and Family Services) to contribute to a pool of money to be added to the Ministry of Education's funding. Some parents are working with Gordon Campbell's office to see if he will fund environmental building initiatives as part of his recent climate change policy.

12. What can I do to help?

Please telephone, email or write the VSB Trustees, our MLA Gordon Campbell, and Shirley Bond, the Minister of Education. Tell them you are unhappy with the current plan. Ask them to direct their staff to move *immediately* to develop better options. Trustees: clarence.hansen@vsb.bc.ca, ken.denike@vsb.bc.ca, allen.blakey@vsb.bc.ca, carol.gibson@vsb.bc.ca, eleanor.gregory@vsb.bc.ca, sharon.gregson@vsb.bc.ca, don.lee@vsb.bc.ca, allan.wong@vsb.bc.ca, shirley.wong@vsb.bc.ca. Vancouver School Board: 1580 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8, 604-713-4500; Gordon.Campbell.MLA@leg.bc.ca .3615 West 4th Avenue Vancouver, BC V6R 1P2 Phone: 604-660-3202 Fax: 604-660-5488 ; Shirley.Bond.MLA@leg.bc.ca. Education Ministry Office. PO Box 9045, Stn Prov Govt, Victoria BC V8W 9E2 CANADA Phone: 250-387-1977 Fax: 250-387-3200.

13. How can I find out more?

The Gordon website <http://www.gordonelementary.ca> has background information. Or you can call Jean Gordon (604-730-4695), Z Smith (604-733-6512), Emily Pickett (604-732-0993) or Ingrid Sulston (604-263-1920).