

## GENERAL GORDON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PAC

2896 West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6K 1X1

**TO: VSB Committee II: Facilities and Planning**

**RE: Response to the General Gordon NCLD Space Program Report**

DATE: January 15, 2010

The PAC of General Gordon Elementary School thanks the Vancouver School Board and the B.C. Ministry of Education for engaging in the Neighbourhood Centres of Learning and Development (NCLD) project. Supporting the complex roles of schools as community hubs as well as safe centres of learning is an important, progressive development.

The General Gordon PAC entered the NCLD consultation process with great enthusiasm. We shared the VSB and Ministry of Education's vision of re-creating schools as community hubs through coordinating school and community resources. A vibrant vision and values for General Gordon was articulated at the Visioning Session in April 2009 and subsequently elaborated on and endorsed by the majority of parents who attended the Open House in October. Together these values underpin the support among parents to retain and renovate the existing structure. Values identified at these two events include:

- ensuring the safety of students, staff, and all who use the school facility
- minimally maintaining our current space with a focus on opportunities for flexibility and expansion of educational and community programming
- meeting full demand for daycare
- making sustainability a priority including fully funding LEED standards and recognizing the sustainability advantages of renovation
- expanding covered play and outdoor learning spaces

It was therefore a great disappointment to see that the consultants' recommendations for the General Gordon NCLD do not reflect the values and vision that were specifically elicited for that purpose. It was disconcerting to see the claim in Recommendation 1 that the "proposed program and space allocation *as envisioned by the school* ...[is] sufficient to meet the stated NCLD program objectives" when in fact the single greatest concern expressed by the school community was that the space allocation was *not* sufficient.

In particular, the specific decision not to provide any additional space to expand the current after school care capacity, thereby not addressing real demand for care and reducing wait lists, is directly counter to the expressed values of our community. Having a safe, onsite provider of care is extremely important to our school. It supports our families and increases the safety and security of our students. No reason was given for this decision, which is especially disappointing in light of the fact that the other two schools in this project have been allocated sufficient space to expand their childcare.

In order to better understand the disconnect between the identified vision and values for General

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Gordon and the recommendations produced, we examined the reports for our sister pilot schools, Lord Strathcona and Queen Mary. We found that the recommendations for Lord Strathcona Elementary appear to reflect the General Gordon values and vision: space is being made available to deliver the future educational program, existing extra-curricular and community programs are being fully accommodated, and additional space is being made available for potential future expansion and flexibility of use. Further the heritage B status of the school buildings is being respected through renovation.

Despite having different strengths, programs, and enrollments, General Gordon and Queen Mary have received exactly the same NCLD space allocation. As one example, the matching top-up of library space clearly does not reflect the fact that General Gordon, but not Queen Mary, has a bilingual library to support the French immersion program. Again, it is hard to see how the recommendations for General Gordon reflect the schools' specific values, vision and needs. Further, General Gordon parents were clear in their comments that covered outdoor play and teaching areas were important. However, the Queen Mary report includes a recommendation to “consider an additional space allocation to accommodate public requests for covered outdoor teaching and play space.” Such a recommendation is not included for General Gordon.

### **Conclusion**

The General Gordon PAC respectfully requests that the report not be accepted in its present form and requests the following amendments:

#### General Feedback, Site Analysis and Concepts

The numerical analysis provided under this heading cannot be replicated. We request that it be reviewed and corrected. Based on the information in the report, it appears that there are 85 respondents to this question of which 49 (58%) indicated a preference for a retention option, 20 (24%) favoured a replacement school, and the remaining did not directly express a preference.

#### Recommendation 1:

The General Gordon PAC does not support the proposed space allocation and we ask that it be increased. The space allocation must recognize the real needs, vision and values of the General Gordon school community that have been identified through the NCLD process as well as address the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning principles. This includes more childcare space, covered play space, and social gathering spaces.

#### Recommendation 3:

The General Gordon PAC requests this recommendation be changed to match the recommendation for Queen Mary Elementary: Consider an additional space allocation to accommodate public request for covered outdoor teaching and play space.

Everyone is eager to move forward with this project and we look forward to seeing the amended report in the very near future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.