

What's wrong with B.C.'s seismic mitigation program for schools?

The province has launched an ambitious \$1.5B seismic mitigation program for BC schools. With the goal of protecting our kids, who could object? Parents at several Vancouver schools, however — including Charles Dickens Elementary, General Gordon Elementary, Kitsilano Secondary, Trafalgar Elementary, and Lord Kitchener Elementary - are concerned. Indeed, General Gordon's Parent Advisory Committee voted unanimously to tell the Vancouver School Board that it did not support its proposal for a new school and asking it to halt the process pending community consultation. A petition asking for a meaningful consultation process before proceeding with any plan gathered more than 500 community and school signatures within about ten days.

The Education Ministry has great intentions. Everyone supports seismic mitigation. Everyone holds children's safety as the highest priority. But the program has other consequences:

- Limited funding and rules governing how it can be used favour demolition over renovation
- The so-called "replacement" schools don't really replace what we already have
- The quality of the learning environment in these replacement schools will be much diminished
- Support spaces for music, theatre, and covered outdoor play areas will be eliminated
- There is no space in these new schools allocated for before- and after-school care programs
- Replacing these schools will be a great loss to our city's heritage

The good news is, we can fix the problems by fixing the program and making our schools safer!

There are a number of things that can be initiated immediately to make the process work and result in better outcomes for everyone:

- The VSB's decision to demolish General Gordon can be postponed
- Immediate steps can be taken to put children in the most at-risk schools into seismically safe portables
- A meaningful community consultation process can be undertaken
- The provincial government can be lobbied to change the funding formula and guidelines for new schools
- The seismic mitigation process can be integrated with the City's EcoDensity process
- Other approaches to seismic upgrading, school planning, and eco-density planning can be explored

Schools play an important role in our communities.

- Any proposed school option should provide all the community uses of the current facility.
- Consistent with the goals of the city's EcoDensity plan, schools can play an enhanced role as a community hub in our communities, but only if they have appropriate spaces to do so.

The process should be more holistic

A narrow approach to seismic upgrading misses an opportunity to upgrade our schools as both educational and community resources.

- Renovation should allow upgrading of the building's major systems as required.
- The seismic upgrading process allows opportunities for integrating with the City's EcoDensity plan

What about the environmental impact of destroying our old school buildings?

- Environmental impacts of all the options must be evaluated in a comprehensive manner.
- Renovation or replacement should meet minimum environmental goals, including adequate daylight, use of non-toxic materials, fresh air and room temperature under teacher control, and energy use improvements.
- The Ministry must estimate the carbon footprint of proposed construction and weigh this against retaining the existing building.

Public input is essential!

- Community members must be informed and consulted in meaningful way
- The process must be transparent. All relevant documents must be available for public review.

**For more information, contact General Gordon parents :
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