

# REPORT

## *DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT*

To: Mayor W. Wright and Members of Council in Committee of the Whole  
Date: April 27, 2009

From: Lisa Spitale,  
Director of Development Services  
File: #99811

Subject: Opportunities Related to the 'Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project'

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

*THAT City Council direct staff to work with School District #40 and the Province to realize community amenities through the development of three new schools in the City under the Province's 'Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project.'*

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### **PURPOSE**

This report summarizes some of the opportunities for community amenities, including child care and early childhood development, community meeting spaces, and enhanced gymnasiums and playfields, which could be realized through the development of three new schools in the City under the 'Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project.'

### **SUMMARY**

Based on the solid foundation which has been built in the areas of community education and early childhood development and based on the needs as documented in this report, New Westminster, through the development of three new schools, could demonstrate the tremendous potential of the 'neighbourhoods of learning' model. This model, which is part of a larger strategy to enhance literacy, calls for the co-location of education and community services in neighbourhood hubs, thus enhancing access to information, resources and services.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Premier of British Columbia has stated that his government is committed to "helping our youngest British Columbians excel – to make sure that they start school as ready to learn as possible." To this end, the government has invested in the Ready, Set, Learn Program, which recognizes that families need positive connections with the school

system and community agencies that provide relevant information and resources. The government has also invested in StrongStart Early Learning Centres, in which qualified early childhood educators lead literacy activities to enable children to grow linguistically, physically and socially.

More recently, the Province announced the ‘Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project,’<sup>1</sup> which will see education and community services brought together in a single neighbourhood hub. The Premier, as part of the announcement, stated: “Schools throughout the Province will be able to adopt this model in the future to best meet the needs of their students and communities.” Examples of possible uses included: “early learning and child care programs, office or meeting spaces for non-profit organizations, health clinics, sports programs, family resource or seniors’ centres, industry training, or branch libraries.”

### **EXISTING POLICY/PRACTICE**

As part of the New Westminster Child Care Strategy (February 16, 2009), it includes the following recommendations:

- *That the City continue to participate on the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Public Partners’ Committee which is working to develop four ECD Hubs serving six neighbourhoods in New Westminster. This body includes the City (through Parks and Recreation and Social Planning), Fraser Health, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the School District, and the United Way of the Lower Mainland.*
- *That a Child Care Protocol be developed whereby the City and School District jointly work to stabilize and increase the viability of existing child care programs within their collective control and that they plan for and develop new child care spaces on City/School District lands and promote joint use of space.*

As part of the New Westminster Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan (June 2008), it includes the following recommendations:

- *Explore opportunities to incorporate Early Childhood Development Hubs as new neighbourhood-based facility spaces are developed.*
- *Build family-centred practices for delivery programs including strategies to support families, build strong relationships with families, develop a family-centre team and strengthen linkages with other organizations.*

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Premier, “Neighbourhoods of Learning Map New Future for Schools,” September 3, 2008.

More recently, School District #40 established a Before and After School Care Task Force, with the inaugural meeting being held on March 24, 2009. The purpose of the task force is to develop a five-year comprehensive strategic plan which addresses ways of maintaining and, where possible, expanding before and after school care spaces on school sites. When complete, this strategic plan will inform the School District's capital planning processes.

## **ANALYSIS**

New Westminster is very supportive of the 'neighbourhoods of learning' model and has been working to create neighbourhood hubs in order to enhance community access to information, resources and services. Two recent initiatives are highlighted below. In addition, New Westminster is served by a number of community schools which facilitate community use of school facilities and enhance learning through formal and informal activities.

### Neighbourhood Schools as Community Hubs

As early as 2005, New Westminster contemplated a concept that espoused many of the same tenants as the 'neighbourhoods of learning' model. Entitled 'Transformative Strategies,' this concept paper called for the use of neighbourhood schools as community hubs. More specifically, it recommended that "school facilities be fully utilized and serve as access points for neighbourhood resources with a multi-service approach working outside the traditional K-12 mandate."

The 'Transformative Strategies' Concept Paper used John Robson Community School as an example of how a neighbourhood school could become a community hub. In phase one, it proposed that there be expanded daycare and before and after school care, early literacy programming, ESL language classes, family support services, parent and tot drop-in programs, and public health and social services. In phase two, it proposed that there be adult and family literacy programming and designated community meeting spaces. In phase three, it proposed that there be senior and youth support services.

While there was community support for the concept, the paper did not move forward to the School Board level as the proponents were unable to secure the necessary capital funding to make this vision a reality.

### Early Childhood Development Hubs

New Westminster is a leader in the area of early childhood development (ECD) and is working to develop four ECD hubs. Planning for two of the four hubs is well underway. In October 2008, City Council endorsed a preliminary concept plan for an ECD hub as

part of the future expansion of the Queensborough Community Centre. In May 2008, work was completed on the Uptown/Downtown ECD Hub Development Study, which identified community needs, essential components and possible sites. Regarding the latter, a central location was preferred (given the steep topography of the area in question), with one of the preferred sites being John Robson.

As evidence of the commitment to collaboration and coordination of services, the ECD Public Partners' Committee recently signed a memorandum of understanding in support of hub development. This committee includes representation from the City of New Westminster, Fraser Health, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, School District #40 and the United Way of the Lower Mainland.

#### Addressing Documented Needs

The three new schools will be located in or adjacent to lower income areas with high concentrations of immigrants, income-assistance recipients, lone-parent families, and renters. As evidence, the Uptown neighbourhood (in which John Robson Community and New Westminster Secondary Schools are located) has the highest share (20.0%) of low-income families<sup>2</sup> by sub-area in the City. The Downtown neighbourhood, which borders the Uptown, has the second highest share at 16.2%. By comparison, the other three sub-areas of the City all have less than 12.5%. The Uptown and Downtown also have a higher share of lone-parent families (18.2% and 17.0% respectively) than for the City-as-a-whole (16.7%).

New Westminster has a large immigrant population, with the Uptown receiving the vast majority of new immigrants. About a third (31.7%) of all residents are immigrants, with close to a quarter (23.1%) having less than five years of Canadian residency. Regarding these immigrants, close to half (46.8%) speak a language other than English at home, with the most commonly spoken languages being Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog, Korean and Spanish. New Westminster Secondary, with a student population of about 2,000, has 42 different home languages. New Westminster also has a significant proportion of residents (3.2%) who report having aboriginal identity. As such, the City is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse municipalities in British Columbia.

The Downtown and Uptown had high percentages (52.9% and 41.3% respectively) of Kindergarten children deemed vulnerable on one of more sub-scales of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (Wave 1). While these percentages dropped significantly as part of Wave 2, they were still higher than for the Province-as-a-whole. The West End neighbourhood actually experienced an increase in the percentage of Kindergarten

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<sup>2</sup> Percentage of economic families with incomes under \$30,000 in 2005.

children deemed vulnerable on one or more sub-scales of the EDI between Waves 1 and 2 (i.e., from 27.0% to 36.5%).

### Moving Forward

The construction of three new schools under the ‘neighbourhoods of learning’ model could present a significant opportunity for the City, School District and Province to demonstrate the considerable benefits associated with this model, while addressing documented needs within New Westminster. If realized, the development of one or more neighbourhood hubs will enhance early childhood development and school readiness; improve literacy levels and school success; and increase community access to information, resources and services.

The following framework sets out draft principles, design considerations and a possible approach for moving forward. This framework is very preliminary and should be used as a basis for further discussion and development.

### Draft Principles

The construction of the new schools should be guided by the following draft principles:

1. The development of schools as community hubs for their neighbourhoods.
2. The efficient use of tax dollars to meet community needs.
3. The enhancement of literacy and learning through formal and informal activities.
4. The effective utilization of school facilities during school and non-school hours.
5. The coordination of agency services for children, youth and families.
6. The development of partnership opportunities.
7. The facilitation of community access to and use of school facilities.

### Design Considerations

All new school facilities should be operated as community schools (with the philosophy being community-focused rather than school-focused during non-school hours). Community use spaces within schools would be provided with exterior access or located in a separate community wing (which would address issues related to the safety of students and the security of facilities and equipment). Spaces such as cafeterias, gymnasiums and libraries could be operated under joint-use agreements, with students given priority during school hours and the community given shared or priority access during non-school hours.

### Possible Approach

Based on the previous studies and based on the documented needs, the following possible approach is proposed:

#### 1. Middle School on the John Robson Site

The new middle school on the John Robson site could accommodate a neighbourhood hub. This hub could include licensed daycare and a range of programming options, including adult and family literacy programs, early childhood development, ESL language classes, family support, parent and tot drop-in, public health, and social services. Community meeting and arts spaces, possibly in the form of a multi-purpose room or rooms, could also be incorporated, as well as enhanced gymnasium and playfield areas to accommodate community use.

Given the emphasis on early childhood development and family strengthening services, this proposed hub would complement the adjacent Children's Centre, which is an initiative of the Simon Fraser Society for Community Living and SHARE Family and Community Services Society. This centre brings together services and supports for children and youth with special needs and their families in a coordinated, integrated model of service delivery. It would also complement the early childhood development hub proposed for Queensborough, which is part of the community centre expansion.

Regarding the child care component, Ready Set Grow Daycare,<sup>3</sup> which is currently accommodated on the John Robson site, should be relocated to the New Westminster Secondary site. As originally intended, Ready Set Grow Daycare, which offers 36 spaces, met the child care needs of young mothers enabling them to complete their education. If relocated, then a new licensed daycare could be developed on the John Robson site. Regarding before and after school care spaces, they should be increased from 20 to at least 40 and relocated to the elementary school on the St. Mary's site.<sup>4</sup> Currently, John Robson Community School is licensed for 40 spaces but these spaces were downsized to 20 due to space limitations.

#### 2. Elementary School on the St. Mary's Site

The new elementary school on the St. Mary's site could accommodate a smaller neighbourhood hub, including licensed daycare, before and after school care, and early childhood development and family support services. Regarding before and after

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<sup>3</sup> Of the 36 child care spaces at Ready Set Grow, 20 serve children 6 weeks to three years and 16 serve children three to five years. Regarding the latter, they subsidize and make possible the infant/toddler care spaces.

<sup>4</sup> There are over 50 parents on the waitlist for a placement with the wait period being one to two years.

school care, there should be a minimum of 40 spaces. Other community amenities could include a community kitchen, one or more multi-purpose rooms, and enhanced gymnasium, playfield and playground areas to meet community needs. Currently, the only public playground in the Downtown is located at Quayside, which is about 1.5 kilometres from the St. Mary's site.

### 3. Secondary School on the New Westminster Secondary Site

The new secondary school on the New Westminster Secondary site should include Ready Set Grow Daycare, which is currently located at John Robson Community School, and retain all existing health and social services. It could also provide enhanced gymnasium and playfield areas to accommodate community use.

### 4. Repurposed or Redundant School Sites

While this report deals with community amenities that could be realized as a result of new school construction under the 'Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project,' there may be other opportunities related to repurposed or redundant school sites. Given the desire to locate an ECD hub in both the East and West Ends of the City and given that there is no obvious location for either of these two hubs at this time, repurposed or redundant school sites could be considered for such purposes.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

With regard to new school construction, there could be up to a 10 percent allowance (budget bonus) to cover the capital costs associated with community amenities.

Regarding ongoing operating costs, community amenities such as child care facilities and early childhood development spaces could be leased to and operated by non-profit societies; while amenities such as community kitchens, multi-purpose rooms and studio spaces could be operated under a joint use agreement between the City's Park and Recreation Department and the School District.

## **OPTIONS**

There are two options for City Council's consideration; they are:

### Option #1:

That City Council direct staff to work with School District #40 and the Province to realize community amenities through the development of three new schools in the City under the Province's 'Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot Project.'

Option #2:

That City Council provide other direction to staff.

**Staff recommend Option #1.**

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Development Services consulted with the Parks and Recreation Department with regard to community amenities that could potentially be located within new school facilities. Additionally, it also consulted with the School District and sought its permission to reference the concept paper entitled ‘Transformative Strategies.’

**CONCLUSION**

New Westminster, under the ‘neighbourhoods of learning model,’ could be a demonstration project, illustrating how new school facilities could meet both educational and community needs. These new schools, which would act as focal points for their neighbourhoods, would demonstrate the power of collaboration and partnership, and foster early learning, literacy and school success. They would also build capacity and contribute to community development within neighbourhoods, enabling residents and service providers to more effectively address socio-economic issues.

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Approved for Presentation to Council

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