

Planning for the Future of Victoria High School: Engagement Summary Report



May 2018



INTRODUCTION

The Greater Victoria School District is planning for seismic upgrades to Victoria High School. Opened in 1914, the high school has an H-1 seismic ranking, the highest level of priority need.

The School District must submit seismic options to the Ministry of Education, with an associated business case, for final funding approval. The Greater Victoria School District sought community input to raise awareness of the decision that must be made and to better understand the community's values and considerations to help inform future decision-making by the Board of Education.

There are a number of considerations when planning for upgrades to a high school including educational needs, capacity and student enrolment projections. Other considerations include operating and capital costs, heritage, environment, community values, and community amenities.

THE PROCESS

Increasing community engagement is a priority area for the Board of Education, and the need for public awareness of the upcoming decision and potential options was identified as necessary to their decision-making. The School District also noted that they did not have any current input about what was important to the community when considering the seismic options for Vic High.

As an initial step in the process, the District undertook early consultation with students, staff, community members, and other stakeholders to help shape options for the Board's consideration and ultimately a business case and preferred option to submit to the Ministry of Education for funding approval.

The public engagement process launched March 15, 2018, with the initial communication and outreach to the public, school community, interested stakeholder groups and media. The survey closed Monday, April 30, 2018. The engagement summary provides a summary of what was heard from all perspectives. Detailed comments are also included.

For more information, visit the project website at <https://www.sd61.bc.ca/news-events/community/vic-high-planning-for-the-future/>

WHAT WE DID

Communications and awareness efforts

The process was broadly communicated to raise awareness and build relationships with interested stakeholders. Activities included:

- A project business card and poster were created to encourage people to visit the SD61 website
- Front page of SD61 website
- Shared on SD61 Facebook and Twitter throughout active engagement period March 16 – April 30, 2018. Paid facebook ads were also utilized
- Technical briefing for media, media releases and outreach to media to schedule news talk shows
- Letters emailed to all catchment parents (Vic High, Central Middle School, Lansdowne Middle School, George Jay Elementary, James Bay Community School, Oaklands Elementary, Sir James Douglas Elementary, South Park).

- Emails and invitations to meet with Vic High Alumni, Fernwood Community Association Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (VCPAC), Hallmark Society and Victoria Heritage Trust, and information to share amongst their networks
- Ads in local community newspapers (Victoria News) and the daily paper (Times Colonist) over two consecutive weeks
- Frequently Asked Questions on SD61 website based on questions being received from the public
- email invitations to Community Association Liaison Committee
- Several schools also shared the information within their social media, newsletters and websites.

Engagement activities

- A series of stakeholder meetings were held to involve and update key groups including the Vic High Alumni, Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (VCPAC), Parent Advisory Councils for Vic High catchment middle and elementary schools, City of Victoria staff and Council, and Victoria Hallmark Society.
- A series of open houses were held at Vic High with students, staff, and the community. The events provided opportunity for attendees to learn more about the seismic need and process, share their values, concerns and feedback through interactive activities, and speak with staff. Tours of the school, guided by students and staff, were offered at the two community open houses.

1. Vic High staff session, Friday, April 6, 2018	40 staff attended
2. Public open house, Saturday, April 7, 2018	315 people attended
3. Vic High student session, Wednesday, April 11, 2018	250 students attended
4. Public open house, Wednesday, April 18, 2018	173 people attended
- An online survey was also available from April 7 – 30 to provide opportunity for those who could not/preferred not to attend an event. The online survey had 1,057 respondents and three print surveys were submitted. Earlier District consultation in 2017 with the school community indicated that online surveys are the preferred method for providing input to the District.
- Some emails and letters were submitted to the School District directly and have been included in the engagement summary package.

KEY TOPICS

Participants were presented with information about the building, long-term facilities plan, student enrolment projections and current catchment boundaries, the seismic upgrading program, and a range of options that may be considered by the Board of Education. Participants were then asked:

Long term facilities plan	Inform
Seismic upgrades in Greater Victoria schools	Inform
Student enrolment	Inform
Catchment area	Inform
Range of options for future of Vic High	Inform
When planning for the future of Victoria High School, what are you most excited about?	Consult
When planning for the future of Victoria high School, what excites you about the process and what concerns do you have?	Consult
What elements of the current Vic High School building do you feel are the most challenging?	Consult
What elements of the building for you value the most?	Consult
Please tell us why you feel this way	Consult
Are there any other ideas/needs that should be considered when planning for the future of Victoria High School?	Consult

WHO PARTICIPATED

Over 1,700 people participated in the open houses, staff and student events, and online survey.

WHAT WE HEARD

There were a number of themes of overall in the open-ended survey comments:

- **Environmental considerations in the planning for any options.** Specific mentions were of energy savings, green or environmental design, retaining green space, reducing operating costs through better environmental design, and concern about the impact of demolition waste associated with demolishing the existing building.
- **The opportunity/need for students within the catchment area to attend the school.** Several associated considerations were raised, including: supporting community connectedness, transportation, affordability and being responsive to the growing population and density downtown.
- There were many comments about **memories and experiences** within the school, and generational connections within families. Many noted several generations of a family attending or working within the school. The school's connection with WW1 and WW2 was mentioned several times.
- **The architectural heritage significance** of the school within the community, in terms of the unique building style, the increasing loss of historic buildings, and the significance of this school building in Victoria, BC and Canada.
- The building is seen by many as a **Fernwood neighbourhood landmark.**
- **Protecting the heritage building** as noted as a learning opportunity for students in terms of expressing community values, cultural inheritance, and not being wasteful.

- Desire to see **increased community access**, in the form of after-hours access, community center/gathering space, affordable housing and child care
- Planning should be **future-oriented** in terms of planning for future student enrolment and evolving learning needs
- Some mentioned that the **lowest cost option** should be selected to ensure funds are available for upgrading of other schools or other infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, others felt heritage preservation was worth the additional cost.
- **Prioritizing student safety** was mentioned often.
- Several questioned whether the **existing building could be retained and re-used, and a new building be built** on site.
- **School amenities and the “best learning environment for students”** received many mentions with specific considerations for technology, flexibility of space, performing arts and sports.

NEXT STEPS

All of the input collected in this process will be shared with the Board of Education, and the public, and will inform further development of options and associated information for the Board of Education’s consideration.

The Board of Education will receive the compiled public input in May 2018 for consideration in June 2018.

APPENDIX

- A. Vic High Staff session
- B. Engagement session: Public open house #1
- C. Student session
- D. Engagement session: Public open house #2
- E. Survey results – Overall
- F. Survey results – Parents of current and future students
- G. Survey results – Past students
- H. Additional correspondence
- I. Media coverage
- J. Communication tools: media release, ads, social media, business card and poster
- K. Display Boards