

Presentation

by the

**Vancouver & District
Labour Council**

to the

Vancouver School Board

on the proposed sale
of the

Queen Elizabeth School Annex

February 12, 2008

Good afternoon. My name is Mable Elmore and I am an Executive member of the Vancouver and District Labour Council which represents 65,000 working men and women in Vancouver and the surrounding region.

First of all, I would like to thank you for allowing me the time to speak to you today about the proposed closure and sale of the Queen Elizabeth Annex.

We have only recently become acquainted with the issues being addressed by your report as we only obtained it in January.

The Vancouver & District Labour Council however, did read and discuss your Educational Facilities Review document and we have some concerns that we would like to express to you today.

We note that your document states that at the center of your considerations in this review is the recognition of your responsibility as a publicly accessible and responsive School Board and your belief that a learner should be provided access to a neighbourhood school.

It is our belief that access to a local neighbourhood school has been shown to be the best learning environment for students, especially younger children in the lower grades.

Providing the best possible learning environment should always be our goal and so we are greatly concerned about your proposal to close Queen Elizabeth School Annex. It is

a local neighbourhood school that meets current capacity requirements and is a well utilized community facility as well.

We are also greatly concerned by your proposal for the disposition of the Queen Elizabeth Annex and property on which it sits once the school is closed.

What you appear to be proposing is to sell the Queen Elizabeth Annex property and invest the proceeds in a leased facility at UBC.

We think this is a foolish idea for a number of reasons:

- 1) Why convert a valuable and well utilized public asset into a leased asset? Isn't this selling our future financial stability for short term gains today.
- 2) You are also creating a potentially negative precedent by selling school assets to finance new schools. This isn't even about exchanging some school board assets for other assets of equal value since you are selling hard assets in exchange for a lease.
- 3) It is our opinion that the provincial government is responsible for financing new schools. Are we now heading towards a scenario where school boards will gradually sell themselves off in order to maintain public education facilities? This is indeed a radical proposal that has not been discussed by the

community and is not adequately addressed in this document.

- 4) By selling the Queen Elizabeth School which is on very valuable property, you are also creating a new dynamic that potentially holds negative consequences for future school boards and students in Vancouver. Up to this point schools have not been targets for redevelopment proposals as they have been clearly out of bounds and regarded as long-standing community assets.

But the bigger picture is what is of most concern.

School closings are an important issue not just for Vancouver but for communities across the entire province of British Columbia. We need a thoughtful long range plan for dealing with declining enrollment.

We do not have one and your document fails to shed any light on that problem. Instead of a consistent long range plan for dealing with a changing school population, you are requiring the citizens of Vancouver to deal with the issue piecemeal, neighbourhood by neighbourhood without a plan for the long-term implications of the decisions that may be taken today.

This is particularly true in Vancouver where the current “rush” to produce an educational facilities review for the UBC to Dunbar area and consult parents and stakeholders

has been pushed through the process in a little over 4 months.

Another serious problem is the pressure of your self-imposed deadline to close the deal before March so that you can take up the lease on the NRC space at UBC. This is not particularly helpful for a community that is just coming to grips with the implications of your proposals and requires time and discussion to be comfortable with any decisions taken.

Although your report doesn't spell it out, it is obvious to our Council and many others in the community that we are only seeing the beginning of school closings in Vancouver. Our expectation is that there are other proposals to follow.

While this report purports to only deal with the UBC to Dunbar Area, it will definitely set a precedent of sorts for dealing with future school closings without having addressed the issue in an overall substantive way.

The Vancouver & District Labour Council considers this process and these proposals ill conceived and we oppose them.