

Submission to the VSB, presented at the February 12 meeting
Lutz Lampe

I am a parent of two daughters, aged 9 and 3, and my older daughter is a grade-4 student at U-Hill elementary.

My statement will be less emotional than some of those we saw/have seen yesterday/earlier. While I feel for my fellow parents and their concerns for their children, I believe the issue before us is too important to be dominated by emotions. By profession I am an engineer and an academic, and my approach is to arrive at decisions based on facts, especially if the decision has as profound impacts on our communities as in this case.

Fact 1:

Every school day, we send out far more than 200 elementary-school students, and here I am not including French immersion students, from the UBC neighborhood to schools in other catchment areas. This largely contributes to the perceived 100% occupation of those schools, mainly Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary.

Fact 2:

Despite this export, U-Hill elementary and U-Hill secondary operate at about 120 % and 160 % of their actual capacity. How is this possible? Well, just let's put up portables. U-Hill secondary students showed you very clearly yesterday what learning conditions this puts our kids into.

Fact 3:

Is this situation in the UBC neighborhood likely to improve in the near future? On the contrary! As of now, we have 680 children at pre-school age, and many more families will move to Middle and South Campus, increasing the pressure on our neighborhood schools and the export of students to other catchment areas.

Fact 4:

Is this a new problem? No, it is not! U-Hill elementary and especially U-Hill secondary have been operated above capacity for years. We have heard the impressive account from a U-Hill secondary student yesterday that his brother has pleaded before this board four years ago. Things have only changed for the worse. Perhaps here I can add my personal experience: When we came to Vancouver 5 years ago and wanted to register our daughter for U-Hill elementary, we were told that we couldn't get in. The school board told us "We know the problem; we are looking for options".

Fact 5:

Is UBC or are developers responsible for providing and perhaps maintaining school facilities? No, they are not! I agree with many other speakers in that it would be desirable if developers were to contribute beyond providing the land. But the money for schools comes from the tax payers. If we would like to see a change, then we have to make a point during provincial elections. BTW, I am a UBC faculty member, and my department as many or all others undergo severe recurring budget cuts. I very much doubt that UBC is the fat cow that can be milked. The UBC endowment is not to be touched as it is supposed to generate revenue for UBC's educational program.

Fact 6:

Is the BC government likely to give more money? Why would they? Schools are being closed all over BC, and the VSB district has, globally, surplus capacity.

So what is it we conclude from all that? Something has to happen for the UBC neighborhood, and something has to happen now. It is, in my opinion, intolerable to delay actions any further. We have a proposal on the table that would allow to remedy the unbearable situation at U-Hill schools, and for students and parents in our neighborhood. Will an exploration of further options on how to finance the rebuilding of schools in the UBC neighborhood result in tangible results? I very much doubt it, as it is clear to me from the facts mentioned.

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Fact 7: Is the proposal on the table perfect for everybody? Clearly not. There will be a certain amount of hardship for parents and students, especially from QEA. But with all due respect, the quantity and quality of problems at U-Hill schools and for children and parents living in the UBC area, and the urgency to solve them, deserves precedence.

I understand that this is not popular with many parents present here [from QEA], and with some of my friends I spoke to yesterday [from QEA]. **But we have the choice between good public schools for everybody within their own neighborhood, or third-world conditions for many and perfect conditions for some. You make this choice.**