

University Hill parents push for new school

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A University Hill secondary parent group passed a motion last week asking the Vancouver School Board to move ahead with phase one of its educational facility review so a long-awaited high school can be built at UBC.

Phase one calls for the sale of Queen Elizabeth annex to help raise funds to build a secondary school at the National Research Council site. University Hill secondary would then be turned into another much-needed elementary.

University Hill parents argue they've been lobbying for improved facilities for more than five years to accommodate a population explosion at UBC and the university endowment lands. University Hill secondary is considered too old and too small to meet student needs. "You need to understand the really, really dire needs of our students and the fact that everybody has been putting their heads together for six years and we have gotten nowhere and now for the first time we have an actually viable solution," explained PAC co-chair Birgit Eder. "It's painful, we understand, but we think under the circumstances it serves the greatest number of students who are in the greatest amount of need."



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Parents says University Hill secondary is too old and too small for the area's growing student population.

The motion, however, is at odds with Queen Elizabeth annex parents if it means their kindergarten to Grade 3 school will be shut down and the property sold.

Eder, who said the annex offers "a fantastic program on beautiful lands," said if another solution was available they'd embrace it, but this appears to be the best chance at improving their facilities. "We've been working closely with the school board for the last six years to get us a school and there have been several close solutions to our problems and none of them have come to fruition despite everybody's best efforts."

Queen Elizabeth annex parent Julee Kaye is concerned the facilities review process is pitting parents and schools against each other and argues the building of a new secondary shouldn't be contingent on the sale of the annex.

Kaye also questions whether the University Hill PAC represents a majority of parents. "Some of them may have gotten involved with the PAC precisely because they had strong views on the need for more schools, so there may be a minority of parents that feel that their child's been forced to eat lunch on the floor for so long that they don't care how many other children have to suffer to remedy that situation," she said.

Kaye adds that the motion doesn't actually say parents want the annex to be sold, but that the new schools go ahead. She's convinced the school district will begin construction as soon as possible and the only question is how it should be paid for.

"I don't think it has to be like this. It shouldn't be parents against parents. The reality is all these parents at UBC, and in Point Grey and Dunbar and the rest of Vancouver have been paying taxes to province of B.C. and the province is supposed to provide safe schools," she said.

A decision about phase one of the educational facilities review will be made at the March 11 school board meeting.

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