

# **UNA Schools Committee Submission to the Vancouver Board of Education, February 11, 2008**

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## ***The Issue***

New housing on Point Grey west of Blanca has led to increased pressure on school facilities. At a time where just about every other area in the City of Vancouver is facing declining enrolment, this area of Point Grey is growing by leaps and bounds. Over 200 young children must be transported more than 5 kilometres to empty classrooms in Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary Elementary Schools. About a hundred secondary students are excluded from the local high school. It is unlikely that this situation will change any time soon.

Data from the 2006 census shows that while nearby areas of Vancouver (Dunbar Heights, West Tenth, and Spanish Banks) have near zero population growth, UBC/UEL areas have grown by almost 40%. Nearly one quarter of all housing (privately owned or rented) has been built since 2001. With further housing planned, some of it already under construction, it is likely that by the next census in 2011 the area population may well double again. The census data also shows that there are 1,545 school age children living in the area west of Blanca. Of this number, 680 children were under the age of six as of the date of the census. Every indication is that this situation will continue.

## ***The UNA<sup>1</sup>***

The University Neighbourhoods Association (UNA), created in 2002, approximates a municipal council for the local areas on the UBC campus, promoting the creation of a vibrant, sociable, safe and diverse university town community at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The UNA Board of Directors is comprised of four directors elected by residents, two directors appointed by UBC and one appointed by students through the Alma Mater Society (AMS). The UNA Chair is required by by-law to be a resident-elected director. The number of elected directors is determined by neighbourhood population and is expected to increase over time.

## ***The Schools Committee***

In response to residents' concerns over the lack of adequate school facilities and services west of Blanca, the UNA has created a Schools Committee. The purpose of the schools committee is to work with community members and associated stakeholders to ensure the adequate provision of schools and learning opportunities within the public education system for children and youth living within the UNA area within the context of the Vancouver Board of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Description of the UNA adapted from the association web page <http://www.myuna.ca/>

To this end a community meeting was held on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The notice to the community for this meeting stated: “On Tuesday, February 5th a workshop style meeting is being held for parents and community members to pull together community sentiment for building new and expanded schools in our community. The meeting is oriented towards UNA members and families living within the U Hill Elementary and U Hill Secondary catchments areas. This meeting is an excellent opportunity as a community to talk through the important issues around ensuring that our children and future children have access to public schools in our neighbourhood”.

## ***The Report***

This report summarizes the comments shared by community members during a meeting February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the Old Barn Community Centre in Hawthorn Place.

About sixty people attended our meeting. Meeting participants came from all areas of the UNA area and also included some residents in the UEL area. All but three people lived in the V6T postal code area (the area west of Blanca). Most of the people in attendance had children in the Public Education system, a few participants were either grandparents or had preschool children. At least one meeting participant had their children in a private school. The majority of parents in attendance had school-aged children enrolled in the following schools:

- U Hill Secondary, 30% of participants
- U Hill Elementary, 25% of participants
- Other High School (Lord Byng, Kitsilano, Churchill, Prince of Wales), 10 % of participants
- Other Elementary Schools (St. Georges, Kerrisdale, Trafalgar, Queen Elizabeth), 10% of participants.
- Ecole Jules Quesnel, 6% of participants
- Queen Elizabeth Annex, 4% of participants

The meeting opened with an outline of the procedures for the evening by UNA School Committee Chair, Charles Menzies. Brief statements followed this general introduction from Birgit Eder (U Hill Secondary Co-Chair), Mankee Mah (U Hill Elementary PAC Co-Chair), and Mike Feeley (UNA Vice-Chair).

Participants then joined pods of 8 to 12 people to discuss and identify (1) concerns, (2) views, and (3) hopes as related to the VSB’s Educational Facilities Review-Phase One. Each group had one person who facilitated and recorded the group’s points on flip chart paper (which form the data upon which this report is based). One of the groups worked in Cantonese and Mandarin in order to facilitate full discussion by all community members present. Small group discussions lasted for about one hour. Following which each small group reported out to the full meeting. This process was selected to ensure that every person could speak and that a diversity of voices and perspectives could be heard in as non-judgmental a manner as possible.

## **Summary of February 5<sup>th</sup> UNA Workshop on the EFR-Phase 1**

The summary that follows outlines, in point form, the key concerns, views, and hopes of the participants.

### **Concerns**

#### **Our Voice:**

- Our Voice is not being heard
- VSB is not hearing from UEL residents and the EFR is going sideways
- That the needed schools are yet again placed on hold.
- What can we do to have our voices heard?
- We need to get the statistics of the situation
- What can we do? – letter writing campaign, email trustees, fill out on-line survey

#### **Rebuild Our Schools**

- We need schools for the neighbourhood badly.
- We need a proper secondary school
- Growing community, need more schools
- Need school with full capacity urgently
- What about capacity for future growth at UBC? Our needs are going to continue to increase
- What about the students who are not even here at UBC yet...we need to speak for them
- Area has grown by 40% since 2001 (includes UEL and UBC) and will continue to grow

#### **Concerns with Current Facilities**

- Lack of facility and equipment in current set up –poor library, no cafeteria
- Good plan required to meet these needs
  - Facilities –gym, café, lab, sports
  - Poor infrastructure
  - Impact on course selections (very limited); math, science; no extra curricular activities; not enough classroom space
- Concerned about large waiting lists at U Hill Elementary
- Poor hygiene at U Hill Secondary
- Horrible conditions at U Hill High School e.g. students eating in halls and classes, no labs, limited gym facilities. Aside from too many students, the facility is not appropriate for a high school
- Concern for safety without seismic upgrading
- Concern about health and safety with overcrowding at existing UBC schools – portables, lack of lunch space
- Overcrowding of facilities

#### **Concern with Future Facilities**

- When will new schools be available?
- Concerned that if U Hill HS becomes an elementary, there will be traffic and safety concerns around the school

- Is NRC Building adequate?
- Is the NRC Building the only option?
- Why do we have to pay rent for NRC? (i.e., question about lease)
- What about the proposal to build new school on existing site and save the annex?
- More money is needed for totally new school. \$25-30 Million renovation versus \$40-45 million to build a new school

### **Concern with Equity for our Children**

- Disparities between U Hill and others schools in the area
- Inequality of small schools at QEA and large ones at U Hill
- Short time for public input
- Even if QEA closes, there are still local neighbourhood schools but more than 200 UBC children now can not attend school in their neighbourhood

### **Concerns with VSB/UBC/Province Involvement (or lack therefore)**

- UBC/VSB have searched for options for years
- UBC community needs a clear outline of the problems at the U Hill schools and how they are coupled with other parts of the VSB plan
- What happened to UBC's commitment to build a school? UBC should be taking some responsibility for the school problem in regard to its profit-making
- In marketing of new housing developments it says that a new school will be built...does UBC know this and is there tacit approval even though there is no current plan for another school south of 16<sup>th</sup> Ave? UBC is making a profit from this false advertising.
- Don't support selling of public space (QEA) as it may be used for other needs in the future
- Pitting parents against each other
- Confusion as to who funds new schools (it's the province through the local school board)
- Is seismic upgrading playing a bigger part in the plan than it seems?

## **Views**

### **Views About Educational Needs**

- Kids going to private school because there's no room here (at U Hill)
- All parts of the city want this type (annex style) of rich solution
- QEA parents are saying a right to a neighbourhood school, so are UBC parents

### **Views on EFR Proposals**

- Support for proposal - inequality of class sizes at QEA vs. other schools, only 67 QEA students affected but over 250 U Hill students affected
- QE Annex –not cost effective, three schools close by; French immersion program
- QEA has to close
- Discussion – one view that the children are flexible to the type of dislocation proposed in the plan as long as they remain with their classes and teachers and that it's the parents who are more worried. The other opinion was that children do find dislocation disruptive.

- Agree with NRC proposal
- In favour of proposal including dual-track FI school at UBC
- In favour of increased FI capacity in the catchment since this is a large and growing catchment in comparison to others in the city
- Like the idea of expanding French immersion program
- Support the plan because of the need for seismic upgrading

#### **Views on Cores Issues**

- Two separate issues (1) New School (2) Annex close down
- Differentiate infrastructure & operations funding – VSB to conduct complete review of facilities & funding/resources allocation.
- We should be careful to separate our need for schools with support for the plan as it exists

#### **Views On VSB/UBC/Province Involvement**

- Province is being inflexible
- Agree that it's VSB's responsibility to address funding/resources issues
- VSB should provide schools in UBC catchment even if it means closing QEA
- Dunbar Residents are asking Can UBC do more?
- UBC provides the land and a building worth \$15 million.
- Dunbar parents focus on UBC Deep Pockets, not the government
- Everyone should chip in \$10 million UBC, VSB, Government, and Developers.
- UBC Lease option didn't happen, no debt financing allowed (could government reconsider?)

#### **Hopes**

- That our children and our neighbours' children have a neighbourhood school to attend that doesn't involve forced bussing
- That the decision is decoupled from the QEA closure issue since the numbers of children in need of new schools at UBC speak for themselves
- That it has been a long fight to get new schools built and now, after four years, we have a solution –it's time to get on with it.