

DPAC Feedback to VSB Facilities Meeting Oct 21, 2020

DPAC sees two distinct aspects being covered in today's meeting on the Long-Range Facilities Planning Strategy 2020-2030 that will result in a recommendation to the Board for approval on Monday, Oct 26th:

1. The Strategic parts such as Educational Vision, Educational Programming Priorities, Guiding Principles of Equity of Access & Building for Modern Learning as well as Strategic Contexts.
2. Annual Long-Range Facilities Planning Process

DPAC has only kudos to give and appreciation for the Annual Long-Range Facilities Planning Process; It is well done and will provide for a repeatable process that will move us forward. Our only feedback for improvement here is that "District Staff and Trustees" be listed under "People" for "Identify Study Concepts."

On all the Strategic elements, we have much to say. Our recommendation that this entire section referencing Strategy be removed until consultation that we know is planned for November, December and January is incorporated and truly informs our Strategy.

To provide context for removing Educational Vision, Educational Programming Priorities, Guiding Principles of Equity of Access & Building for Modern Learning as well as Strategic Contexts as an item for Board approval on Monday, Oct 26th, we provide the following:

DPAC strongly feels that the following are critical for the LRFP to be even minimally viable to address the challenges that Vancouver faces:

1. A true "Long Range" vision that exceeds 10 years.
2. A planning methodology based on where kids live and will live.
3. An explicit articulation of capacity targets.

DPAC has shared these with the VSB Senior Management Team as well as with Trustees and thanks all for giving our concerns time and attention. DPAC values the open relationship with the VSB Senior Management Team which answers all our questions and has provided us with raw data which we have analyzed. DPAC appreciates the desire of the Trustees to have all three DPAC recommended principles incorporated into a LRFP and also understands the pressure to have a passed LRFP, which VSB last did in 2016.

Balancing everything in front of us, DPAC is onboard with getting a VSB LRFP passed in January as a Ministry requirement to secure funding for major capital and seismic projects, provided that the LRFP that is passed in January is either:

1. Limited to the Ministry requirement to backup the 2021/22 5 year capital plan; that is, it only references the details of the schools mentioned in our 5 year capital plan and adjacent schools required for planning purposes.

or

2. An LRFP that incorporates a limited version of DPAC three recommended principles:
 - a. It provides a “Long Range” vision that exceeds 10 years and there seems to be full alignment from VSB SMT & Trustees on this.
 - b. That articulates capacity targets and there seems to be some alignment from VSB SMT & Trustees on this.
 - c. Instead of using “where kids live and will live” as a base methodology, it is limited for now to providing further relevance to all Study Areas of the LRFP.

DPAC acknowledges that there are big challenges to solve the unique duality that Vancouver has of high growth/no growth areas. Either of these modified LRFP scopes, allow us to reset or build toward a final plan that gets the solutions that we need.

Now, onto the first feedback point that DPAC has for the Long-Range Facilities Planning Strategy 2020-2030 is for it to incorporate VSB’s guiding principle of:

Transparency: We are open, honest, and accountable.

Be honest about the challenges that Vancouver faces and seek informed consultation. Be open & accountable by factoring in where kids live and will live. DPAC will provide a few planning contexts for the inclusion of this guiding principle:

Take Kindergarten:

We have a situation where in Feb 2020, we had 3,751 Kindergarten kids register in the VSB system for 3,977 Kindergarten spots; that’s 94% of the spots taken! However, many of these spots are not in the right locations based on where kids live. If all kids had to be placed at their catchment school, the problem would be 615 kids in over 35 schools but we have movement and special programs, so after that selection, 285 kids lost a draw placing them on a waitlist to get into their local catchment school; we do have a growth problem. Conversely, we had 341 spots across 31 schools where not enough kids were present in those areas to register; we do have a no growth problem too.

Planning Challenges:

VSB SMT has shared that Baragar net-migration methodology does not work well for 1) New residential developments on previously undeveloped land. 2) New multi-residential developments in existing neighbourhoods in areas that have had limited redevelopment in the past & 3) New affordable and social housing initiatives. All three of these are prevalent in many parts of Vancouver. DPAC agrees with VSB SMT that many past development projects failed to have many kids living in them and that housing affordability makes planning more difficult. Today, the ground truth says that the situation is changing in many places, especially where low and medium densification is taking place and where affordability initiatives are enacted. All the more reason to ensure that where kids live and will live is incorporated into our planning.

Human Behaviour:

Planning must take human behaviour into account if we want to have a Vancouver that is worthy of families living in it. Challenge: Planning that understands human behaviour would contemplate the scenario of “moving” Sir Guy Carleton to the River District and determining if more families would then move to the area and to Vancouver and therefore achieve a net increase of kids into the VSB system.

Before DPAC gets into the more specific feedback that we have on the LRFP Strategy, one more point to make on transparency.

Plan for All Schools & Properties

DPAC believes in all schools & properties being planned for in the LRFP. We hope that, eventually, the separate Land & Asset Strategy is a component of a comprehensive LRFP.

Now, let us continue on the DPAC feedback for what could be incorporated or detailed better in the Long-Range Facilities Planning Strategy 2020-2030:

Integrate equity as a core principle for planning VSB facilities

Context: The VSB assesses the social impacts of all facilities decisions, including impacts on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the cultural safety of vulnerable communities, drop-out rates for at-risk populations and child poverty.

Consider: If a school has a Special Education Classroom or Assisted Learning Classroom, is it considered “vacant” space? If a Tier 1 School has a Media/Technology Room, is that considered “vacant” space? If a school has a StrongStart classroom, is that also “vacant” space?

Partner with City of Vancouver on “Vancouver Plan”

Context: Projections for future neighbourhood school populations are determined in partnership with the City of Vancouver & Vancouver Plan can drive family-friendly density to low-enrollment schools, while taking steps to avoid the displacement of low-income populations. The idea of a “neighbourhood school” is at the core of any complete and connected community.

Consider: How can we plan for the Vancouver that we want together based on the concept of complete communities and what happens if two of the most important planning processes in our city are not fully aligned?

Build Resilience:

Context: While providing increased opportunities to connect students to their learning & enhance support for students with specific needs, VSB has the strength, capacity and ability to

deal with the ebb & flow of demographics as well as unforeseen events, be they a pandemic, unexpected growth, earthquake.

Consider: Ministry of Education being responsible for Child Care and how that will impact our facilities.

Equity of Applied Skills & Choice Programs

Context: Having access to special programs across all zones of the City and applying to those programs for educational reasons and not as a overflow hedge.

Consider: Every school and every zone having a reputation of learning excellence.

Serious Sustainability

Context: Build modern schools and infrastructure to meet our sustainability targets.

Consider: Every facility decision having a “Good or Bad” designation so that it is front and center to the decision and separating out the extra costs for sustainability so that a separate sustainability business case can be made for it.

Safe Routes: Walk, Cycle, Roll to/from School

Context: Many VSB families would like to walk, cycle and roll, but they don't feel it's safe or convenient on the way to school or at school. Families say the roads are too dangerous. More safe infrastructure needs to be built at and around schools that prioritizes the most vulnerable road users.

Consider: As part of a city wide masterplan, the Six Big Moves, and the LRFP, the VSB commits to ensuring ALL children have access to designated safe routes to school in partnership with the City of Vancouver so that most families choose to walk, cycle, and roll because it's safe, fun, secure, and convenient at school and on the way.

Innovative Approaches:

Context: Thinking outside the box: Rightsizing, Incentivize Consolidations with new schools that go beyond BC Area Standards, Non-Traditional Design, Community Partnerships, CSF site leases, Movie Studio, Flexible Education/Office configurations that can adjust to growth.

Consider: The new Ministry guidelines state that a LRFP “should involve an exploration of a variety of alternative solutions that could address evolving school district needs, even if such alternatives are a direct challenge to the status quo.”

One final note on an adjacent policy issue: Given the massive disruption caused by past LRFPs which have acted as “Closure Lists”, DPAC advocates changing Board Policy #14 to ensure that any closure decision provides more than a full school year notice to families that will be impacted by the closure. We believe this change needs to be made before an LRFP is approved.

DPAC looks forward to working with all for the betterment of our kids and generations of kids to come. Thanks to all for considering the views of DPAC.

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