

## District nixes Braemar development

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

January 20, 2016 12:00 AM



file photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

The eventual rebuilding of Argyle secondary will likely have to be scaled back after the District of North Vancouver voted against rezoning an unused portion of the Braemar elementary land to be sold.

The North Vancouver school district was counting on the \$2.4 million from Wedgewood Developments for its portion of the preferred size of the \$51.5-million rebuild of Argyle. The province has committed only enough funds for a \$37.8-million seismic upgrade of the school. The rest must be raised by the school district.

In June 2014, the previous council voted down Wedgewood's plan for seven single-family homes on the unused, wooded piece of the property. The new proposal had shrunk in size by about one-third and featured only four single-family homes, each with a secondary suite, as well as green corridors buffering the project from both the school and immediate neighbours.

But when it came time for a vote, half of council could not stomach moving the process any further, either on the principle that public land shouldn't be sold to fund rebuilding schools, or because it had simply become too divisive.

Couns. Lisa Muri, Jim Hanson and Mathew Bond voted against sending the proposal to a public hearing while Couns. Robin Hicks and Roger Bassam along with Mayor Richard Walton voted in favour. Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn was unable to attend due to illness. Under the B.C. Community Charter, a tie vote is considered defeated.

"I respect the views of those who say the school system is being underfunded. I respect those who say that the children who are suffering from this underfunding should not be the ones who pay the price and I respect the motives and intentions of those who seek to take value from these lands for the purpose of educating North Vancouver school attendees and for the Argyle project in particular," Hanson said. "However, it would violate my conscience to vote in favour of a matter going to public hearing when what is at stake is the repurposing of public lands for private use."

Muri too acknowledged that Argyle needs to be rebuilt but she said highrises had come up for council approval without stoking such unrest. She challenged the full council gallery to apply the same level of lobbying to the

province.

"I want the province to tell me why I have to make this decision because they don't want to adequately fund our schools and our communities," she said. "If you can ramp up for a four-lot subdivision like this, ramp up and challenge the MLAs. There's an election coming up. Challenge how we are funding our schools in this province because it makes no sense. It has not made sense for years. They are pitting our communities against one another."

But council was being premature in voting the proposal down before holding a public hearing, Bassam and Walton charged.

"There's an awful lot of voices tonight that aren't here. We can complain about the province. We can complain about the divisiveness. I don't think the school district particularly wanted to pit one part of the community against the other..." Walton said. "By not going to public hearing, I think we're denying a lot of voices who would have an opportunity to be in on that discussion."

Bassam reminded his council colleagues that voting to hold a public hearing is by no means a vote in favour of the project.

"You don't have to vote for it at the end of the day but you do have an obligation as an elected official to listen to all the people," he said.

Normally that should be the case, but here the proposal is essentially the same - taking into account the now allowed secondary suites, that was rejected by council in 2014. -cjk

Following the meeting, North Vancouver school district superintendent John Lewis said the decision will impact future Argyle students and the Braemar and Lynn Valley communities.

"We're deeply disappointed in really a lost opportunity to convert an unused school district asset for the direct benefits of the immediate community for traffic, parking and student safety and for the students of North Vancouver," he said. "The boards of education have had to make extremely difficult and challenging decisions and they've been able to do so by maintaining a primary focus on the needs of all 16,000 students that we serve and the general public."

Focussing on needs of current generation while robbing future ones of their choices is the definition of "unsustainability". The disputed lands count towards overall land required for future needs and would, if sold, prove limiting in meeting those needs -cjk

With \$2.4 million less to spend, the new Argyle will have to be about 10,000 square feet smaller, likely coming from the portions of the school that the general community also uses, Lewis said. It may also reduce classroom capacity in one of the district's fastest growing neighbourhoods.

The school district will continue to consider its options for the Braemar land, Lewis said.

© 2016 North Shore News

[Sign up for the North Shore News FREE digital newsletter to receive top headlines from each issue in your Inbox. \(http://www.nsnews.com/newsletter/subscribe\)](http://www.nsnews.com/newsletter/subscribe)