

Scaled-down Argyle rebuild considered

School district still waiting for province to approve project

[Jane Seyd](#) / North Shore News

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file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore NEws

It's likely back to the drawing board for the North Vancouver School District to consider what to cut from its Argyle secondary replacement project.

A decision to scale down the project is the most likely scenario after the school district recently failed to win municipal approval of a plan to rezone and sell a parcel of land next to Braemar elementary. That has left the school district about \$2.3 million short of the money needed for its preferred rebuild project.

Schools superintendent John Lewis told trustees at their recent regular meeting the school district has still raised enough money through land sales – approximately \$13.8 million – to replace the school rather than doing just a seismic upgrade.

But the cut to the budget means the school district likely won't have the cash to pay for all the extras officials had hoped to include – including classroom space for about 100 more students, a community fitness facility and change rooms that could be accessed from the field, plus room for a 250-seat performing arts area.

That “may not be as large in scope as intended,” said Lewis. “Some of those may not be possible.”

The cut to the budget will likely mean the building will have to be reduced by about 10,000 square feet, said Lewis – from an originally envisaged 130,000 square feet to about 120,000 square feet.

Argyle is currently built to an official capacity of 1,200 students, but the school district had hoped to build a replacement school with a capacity of 1,300 students. “If we build it at 1,200 there are going to be some space pressures,” said Lewis – meaning the school district may have to pay for portables or an addition later on.

But Lewis said no decisions can be made on the design for a new school until the province signs off on a project agreement for Argyle that will specify how much money the school district is allowed to spend on the project.

"We are patiently waiting," said Lewis. "No design work has been done."

Cost estimates are regularly recalculated, Lewis told trustees.

In the fall, a basic replacement of the school was pegged at \$45.7 million while the district's preferred option had a price tag of more than \$51 million.

This fall, parents whose kids are in the Argyle catchment area started an online petition to try to get the District of North Vancouver to approve the Braemar land deal. But parents whose children attend Braemar and others in the neighbourhood were equally opposed to the development plan.

District councillors said if parents want to blame someone for the Argyle project being scaled down they should look to the province, which has refused to fund the cost of full school replacement projects.

Ministry of Education spokeswoman Kaitlyn Rosenberg said in a statement this week that "the replacement of Argyle Secondary is one of the highest priority high school projects current being considered" by the ministry. Rosenberg said the province is still in the process of doing "a final detailed review" of a report submitted on the project by the North Vancouver School District. "We are optimistic we will be able to move forward with this project soon," she stated.

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