

north shore news

Argyle secondary rebuild awaiting provincial approval

Target date for opening of new school is Sept. 2019

Jane Seyd / North Shore News

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Argyle French immersion students Lelia Kostiuk and Joshua Johnson, Grade 12, attend the graduation breakfast at the school last Friday. Kostiuk, a Grade 9 student, joined in to celebrate her first-place win at last month's provincial French public speaking competition. Johnson came third. Photo Mike Wakefield

The North Vancouver School District is inching towards a deal with the province for a \$49.9-million rebuild of Argyle secondary, but nothing's official yet.

Recently, the school district called for proposals from architectural firms interested in working on the project. Administrators hope to interview potential architectural teams by the end of this month, so everything's ready when the rebuild gets the green light.

But so far, there's still no signed deal with the province committing money to the project.

The ministry has asked for a detailed update on anticipated costs and for confirmation that the school district has a solid plan to pay back its existing \$6.2-million capital debt before approving the project.

Realistically, a contract to build a new school may not be in place until school starts in September, said superintendent John Lewis.

The target date for opening a new Argyle school is now September of 2019, which means students who are currently in Grade 3 at nearby elementary schools can expect to walk through the doors for the start of their Grade 8 year.

Three years ago, Argyle was identified as being at high risk for serious damage in the event of an earthquake.

For the past 10 years, replacement of seismically risky Argyle and Handsworth secondary schools have been top priorities on the North Vancouver School District's capital plan.

A seismic upgrade for Argyle was announced prior to the last provincial election.

Argyle and Handsworth are among the 38 high-risk schools around the province that have been approved for seismic funding, but are without a signed project agreement in place.

Part of the reason for delay hinges on the Ministry of Education being satisfied the North Vancouver school district has a plan in place to fund the difference between the estimated costs of a \$40-million seismic upgrade and the cost of a complete rebuild, estimated at costing anywhere between \$9 million and \$15 million more.

The school district is planning to use money from the sale of former school properties, including Keith Lynn, Monterey, Ridgeway Annex and a piece of land at Braemar to pay for that, as well as pay off the \$6.2 debt previously taken out to rebuild Sutherland and Westview schools. That debt must be paid off by the end of December.

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