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North Vancouver school trustees signal new direction on Lucas, Cloverley

Jane Seyd / North Shore News

February 20, 2015 09:35 AM



File photo Kevin Hill

North Vancouver school trustees are taking a step back from plans that had pointed to the sale and future development of Cloverley and Lucas Centre lands, saying they want to re-consider community opinions that urged the school district to hang on to the properties.

A majority of trustees on the newly elected board of education indicated their shift in approach during discussion of the City of North Vancouver's draft official community plan at a meeting Tuesday night.

Trustees voted to ask the city to remove the properties from special study areas in the OCP.

School board chair Barry Forward said the move sends a message to the public that "we have not made a decision on those lands."

"Nothing's off the table and no decisions have been made," he said.

Vice-chair Megan Higgins, newly elected to the school board in November, said, "I heard a lot during the election about the lack of opportunity to discuss community use options for that property."

Both trustees Susan Skinner and Jessica Stanley echoed the need to listen to community concerns.

"I think we've heard a very significant community opinion," said Stanley. "We need to show we've heard that."

Pamela Pike, president of the Hamilton Heights neighbourhood association, said following the vote this week she was thrilled with the board's new direction.

George Ellis, a member of the Cloverley Residents Association, said he was also pleased with the decision. "School properties were paid for by taxpayers. They are irreplaceable and should remain in the hands of the school district for future schools or other community uses," he said.

The vote Tuesday marked a distinct change in philosophy from several options for the land put forward by previous school board.

Last April, the board went public with a series of potential concepts for the properties, which ranged from single-family homes to midrises, and in once case, a highrise tower on the Lucas site, along with varying degrees of preserved green space and sports fields.

Both the Cloverley Residents' Association and neighbours in the Lucas Centre's Hamilton Heights area were unhappy with the plans, saying they were worried about the potential loss of Cloverley Park and would prefer to see the land preserved for public use.

The potential development of the lands was a hot topic for both school board and City of North Vancouver candidates during the recent civic election.

Skinner, Higgins and Forward all told the North Shore News they were against selling school lands to pay for capital costs, as was the practice of the previous school board. Stanley said she was "generally not in favour" of it unless there was community support.

Not all trustees were in favour of the new direction.

Trustee Franci Stratton, the former board chair, said conducting a study doesn't necessarily mean a land use change will happen.

Stratton said it made sense to work with the city in determining possible future uses of those properties.

Forward said after the meeting trustees will now have to decide the next steps for consultation, which may involve speaking with community groups interested in using the properties.

He said the school district doesn't want the properties to sit vacant.

"They cost us money to have vacant," he said. "No one likes when there is an empty school in their community."

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