

School sites considered for affordable housing

The more we can get townhouses, condos with two or three bedrooms, the more we can bring in families.

Metro Vancouver is exploring the idea of co-developing school sites across the region with rental housing and daycare centres, saying it would provide denser communities and more affordable options to low-income families.



RICHARD LAM Vancouver school board chair Mike Lombardi says he would welcome discussions on affordable housing on school sites.

The move, which could see social housing units built on a corner of an existing school lot or combined as part of a school being seismically upgraded, is part of an overall analysis by Metro Vancouver into how it can provide more affordable housing to a growing raft of single- or low-income parents as house prices continue to skyrocket across the region.

Don Littleford, of Metro's housing division, said the idea is just being introduced at this stage, but could significantly help low-income families, particularly single parents, by reducing parking, transportation and housing costs, while boosting school enrolments in places like Vancouver.

"I don't need to say it, but there seems to be a bit of a housing crisis in our region," Littleford said. "We're as much designing the social system of the future as much as housing.

"If you had a school or a daycare on a residential site it may take some of the pressure off." "It seems to us it's worth exploring at this point."

Metro Vancouver has already begun discussions with North Vancouver and Coquitlam school districts, Littleford said, with plans to canvas others, including Vancouver and Surrey. Any changes, however, would ultimately require approval from the provincial government, which has control over B.C. school sites.

North Vancouver said “the potential of affordable housing and daycare” is part of the school district’s guiding principles for longterm land management, but it is not considering such options right now.

But Vancouver school board chairman Mike Lombardi said he would welcome the discussions, especially as the district faces the closure or repurposing of up to 21 schools.

The VSB held open houses a few years ago to consider the idea of allowing housing at the John Oliver secondary and Carlton elementary sites to generate funds to upgrade the schools, he said. Both areas are already zoned for residential, but the school board decided not to pursue the idea after the province said it would confiscate any surplus funds for general capital.

The VSB is now looking at leasing some or all of the school sites as they close. Some 50 interested parties are already on a list, he said, but any potential sharing of school lands must fit with the community.

“We would welcome hearing from Metro. Those are definitely opportunities,” Lombardi said. “One of our challenges in Vancouver is people are coming to Vancouver but fewer and fewer with kids. The more we can get townhouses, condos with two or three bedrooms, the more we can bring in families.”

Surrey school board chairman Shawn Wilson agreed the idea is worth exploring, saying “it strikes me as a sensible kind of thing to pursue or look at.”

But he noted the challenge is that such decisions rely on the provincial government. His district had wanted to build amenities, including a swimming pool, as part of a new school in Grandview Heights, for instance, but didn’t have the provincial funding for the school when the city wanted to move ahead with its civic projects.

Littleford maintains something has to be done, whether it be in fast-growing Surrey or in highpriced Vancouver, which is losing families and is at risk of becoming a “resort” city.

He insists the proposal is not a priority right now, but said it would complement Metro’s more urgent goals such as developing affordable housing around transit hubs across the region.

The regional district is also looking at redeveloping all of its housing sites, especially those located near schools.

Metro has 3,400 social housing units, but plans to boost that number with redevelopment of some of its current housing facilities.

Another option being investigated by Metro is building affordable housing over transit guidelines, similar to what’s been done near the New Westminster SkyTrain station.

A recent survey by U.S.-based Demographia found Vancouver was the third-least affordable city in the world for a home, behind Hong Kong and Sydney, Australia.

14 Comment(s)



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

20 April 2016

07:21

This will be nowhere near enough affordable housing to meet the needs of the community. With more applicants than takers, there will be "lottery winners" and "all the rest".

I see nothing on the horizon to dampen foreign demand for housing, which is the biggest cause of our lack of affordable housing. Nothing like 1) fixing the Quebec investor immigrant loophole that allows people to apply in Quebec but land in Vancouver, 2) fixing the "China as world's largest offshore tax haven" by having CRA crack down on people who fail to declare foreign income, 3) finding ways to tax family income when most of the family remain in Canada while the breadwinner works abroad and ships income to Canada to support house, home, kids in school, vehicles and living expenses.



[GMan](#)

20 April 2016

07:28

"Vancouver was the third-least affordable city in the world for a home" and this plan will do absolutely nothing for the middle class.

The rich will still have their \$5 Mil houses on the West Side or their \$1 Mil houses on the East Side. The poor will be sprinkled all over in social housing. The middle class can't afford the \$1 Mil East Side house and won't qualify for the subsidized housing.

[BCLA - Gibsons Public Library \(PQ\)](#)

20 April 2016

07:28

"Affordable housing" is a very vague term. Affordable to whom? Can we have price ranges, please? And income ranges? Jancis M. Andrews, Sechelt