

north shore news

LETTER: Argyle rebuild not tied to land sales

North Shore News

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Dear Editor:

Suggesting that funding for the North Vancouver school district's critical Argyle secondary seismic/rebuild project is contingent on the NVSD selling off school properties is tantamount to suggesting the provincial government is using blackmail to tie the hands of locally elected school boards to get what it wants.

The truth is the Ministry of Education has simply asked the North Vancouver Board of Education for a plan for the repayment of the \$9-\$15 million upgrade costs of moving from a seismic project to a full rebuild of Argyle, which the board has done.

Nowhere in that plan are there deadlines for the sale of school properties or specific sale amounts required. The school district only had to show that it had a plan and the ability to repay the extra full rebuild costs.

Our school district, with what can only be described as a triple-A credit rating, has earned the right to secure adequate (and already promised) funding for our aging public education school infrastructure and our record has shown that we will continue to honour our limited debt exposure if, and when, needed.

By focusing solely on the timing of land sales it is assumed that there is only one way to fund school replacement projects which is to sell school property for market housing. Have we lost our collective ability to find the money for these important projects other than simply disposing of valuable community assets?

With a growing population and a change in demographics, our community needs continue to grow, yet determining these needs has proven difficult within the silos in which local leaders are elected.

These public lands are being sold based solely on the school district's conclusion that the lands and facilities are deemed surplus for the public education sector alone. It is my view that a multisectoral inventory of community needs must be undertaken before we sell public lands that we will never be able to afford to buy back. In

fact, when the Board of Education, and other locally elected officials met earlier this year with the Minister of Education Peter Fassbender, the most pertinent question he asked the board was, "what are your community needs?" Good question, yet decisions to sell school lands are being made without this critical information.

The Ministry of Education is quite explicit and sets out by ministerial order specific requirements boards must meet. It states that the board must conduct broad consultation with local government, community organizations and the general public regarding alternative community uses before school lands can be sold.

So to suggest that the safety needs of our students and staff should wait for school lands to be sold is preposterous, and undermines the integrity of our local communities, let alone our locally elected councils, school trustees and MLAs.

Susan Skinner School Trustee

North Vancouver Board of Education

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