

north shore news

District of North Vancouver to buy Keith Lynn school site

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The shuttered Keith Lynn alternative secondary school Photo file, North Shore News

The shuttered Keith Lynn alternative secondary site is on its way to becoming a new highway offramp - part of a larger project aiming to reduce congestion in one of the most traffic snarled areas of the North Shore.

The District of North Vancouver has inked a \$5-million dollar deal to buy the property from the North Vancouver school district, which has the money pegged to fund a rebuild of Argyle secondary.

The school district was previously looking to sell the land to North Shore Studios but the municipality intervened, warning the land would have limited development potential and would likely be targeted for expropriation for a redesign of the interchanges north of the Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing, according to David Stuart, District of North Vancouver chief administrative officer.

The municipality has been working with the province for the last two years on a plan to separate bridge traffic from people simply trying to cross the highway. Part of that project includes a Highway 1 off-ramp through the Keith Lynn property connected to Keith Road, which is in the process of being widened and connected directly to the Fern Street overpass. The result should be less congestion for commuters regardless of which way they're headed, said Gavin Joyce, the district's manager of parks, engineering and facilities.

"We know about 39 per cent of the vehicles coming down the Cut just want to go east-west. They don't want to cross the bridge," Joyce said. "If you can take me out of the lineup, you're going to get to the bridge quicker."

Engineers are still studying the property to determine exactly what the new ramp will look like and where it will meet up with Keith Road, as well as what else may fit on the land. One of the considerations is a new combined fire hall and training facility to replace the Lynnmour fire hall on lower Mountain Highway at Hunter Street and the training and maintenance facility on St. Denis Street. Both of those neighbourhoods are in midst of residential redevelopment.

Public consultation for the project is expected in the spring of 2015 with work to begin in 2017 at the earliest.

"What we need to do is finalize the design from a technical standpoint so we can go to the community and say 'Does that work for you? Are there suggestions you have?'" Stuart said.

Any decision about what happens with the land will have to get council approval. The total cost of the highway project is expected to be \$140 million, though that would be shared with the province and federal government, Stuart said.

The Keith Lynn site may offer operational and financial efficiencies for the fire department, said district fire chief Victor Penman, but we are still a long way from knowing if the site is even feasible.

"The opportunity may not present itself to do that but we think that would make a lot of sense. We're always evaluating sites with that lens," Penman said.

The International Association of Firefighters local 1168, meanwhile, is warning the move could result in the department losing its ability to maintain its trucks in-house, resulting in expensive outsourcing.

"It would be much easier to find a single functional fire-hall site; leave the maintenance and training site where it is at a tremendous savings to taxpayers," said Brian Leavold, 1168 president.