

Hunt starts for new West Shore schools

By Goldstream News Gazette

Published: **December 16, 2011 09:00 AM**

Updated: **December 16, 2011 09:499 AM**

It's been a month and a half since the province announced funding for two new West Shore high schools, and Sooke School District superintendent Jim Cambridge is starting to imagine what the new buildings could look like.

In the new year, SD 62 will ask for public input into the design of the new schools. But for now, school district staff and trustees wanted to see firsthand what type of school could be built with an expected budget of \$50 million per school.

Last week, Cambridge and his colleagues were on the Mainland for a training course for the new trustees, and they made time to visit two modern new schools: Burnaby Central, which was built for \$50.6 million and opened this fall for a student population of 1,300; and Abbotsford Collegiate, a \$45-million Neighbourhood Learning Centre slated to open next year for 1,200 students.

"It was energizing to walk through the schools and think, 'we could have this in Colwood and Langford,'" Cambridge said.

Belmont will be replaced with two new high schools — one on the site of Glen Lake elementary and one on the Royal Bay land.

Like all new schools in the province, the West Shore schools will be built to a LEED Gold environmental standard. Touring Mainland schools gave Cambridge an idea of what that looks like.

"There's lots of innovative energy-saving elements," he said, citing for example hall lights that automatically dim while classes are in session and water fountains with nozzles for filling reusable bottles. "They're small things, but they're great ideas."

He also noticed the schools had a lot of natural light and were centered around flexible student-centred gathering spaces. "The schools were just nice to be in," Cambridge said.

Both new West Shore schools will follow the community learning centre model, where the school district will partner with municipalities to build facilities for students and the public.

The school at Glen Lake, for example, will use Goudy and Bear Mountain turf fields rather than building its own sports fields. The Royal Bay school will likely have a theatre space for student and community use.

"We'll be asking for the public's input on what other sort of public amenities they'd like to see in the schools," Cambridge said, suggesting a shared medical clinic or library could be possible options.

SD62 is in the process of hiring a consultant to begin that consultation in January. It's already hired a firm to provide the ministry of education with technical specifications required for the new schools, which will be used to better estimate the budget for the project.

"A lot of people are working very hard behind the scenes to keep moving this project along," Cambridge said.

As for the existing Belmont site, the land will be sold to help finance the two new schools. Langford Mayor Stew Young envisions high density and highrises on the site — giving its Langford "city centre."

Young is thinking 10 and 20 years down the road, but said the Belmont property is the future core of

Langford.

The land has potential for buildings 10 to 30 storeys, he said, making it a key economic generator in upcoming decades. He sees that area as an economic rival to downtown Victoria.

"We've been waiting to get the Belmont land. (The new schools project) is great for the kids and its a great economic generator for the future," Young said. "That is the city centre site there. That is the future."

—with files from Edward Hill

news@goldstreamgazette.com

Find this article at:

<http://www.goldstreamgazette.com/news/135741033.html>