

New schools good news for West Shore

By Goldstream News Gazette

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The Ministry of Education announced on Monday that the West Shore will finally receive its two new high schools to replace the aging and overcrowded Belmont high school.

This long awaited decision has huge positive implications for the entire West Shore population from Sooke through Colwood, Langford and beyond — all of School District 62.

Firstly of course for the long suffering students, teachers and parents of the District — they will soon have brand new, long deserved facilities.

Special thanks to the leadership of the SD 62 trustees and administration and also to Belmont student Ravi Parmar and his team who led an inspired student walk out last June that probably helped push this over the goal line — sometimes civil action does work.

The Belmont site will be sold for the highest and best use, most likely at a premium price, as it is prime development land right in the heart of Langford, giving the province millions of dollars in new revenues.

Local municipalities will gain enormously as these schools will promote increased development and housing and combined with the new use of the old Belmont site for development, will substantially increase the tax base.

The municipalities of Langford and Colwood are to be especially thanked and congratulated for their civic leadership and creativity — especially Langford Mayor Stew Young and Colwood Mayor Dave Saunders as they came together with SD 62 and created an innovative partnership that will save the province millions of dollars.

In Langford a unique use arrangement with developer Westhills, will let the students of the new high school there (to be located on the old Glen Lake school site) use the new sports fields on Langford Parkway including Goudy field and Bear Mountain stadium. Saving the province millions for land and facilities normally connected to a high school.

In a different but similar vein in Colwood, the 11 acres that SD 62 owns in Royal Bay will be supplemented by an additional 3.5 acres that the City of Colwood will receive from any new owner.

Colwood has committed this acreage to the SD 62 for use for an arts centre. The West Shore Chamber of Commerce recently completed a report on this centre's potential and found that more than 96 per cent of those local residents surveyed favoured this idea.

The new schools will go a long way to encourage families to come and stay on the West Shore — we were actually losing families and having trouble attracting others to the West Shore over this issue, making this a huge economic development opportunity. The decision therefore, also fits nicely into the premier's families first and jobs plan.

Not only for the construction and teaching jobs implied but for the contribution to the long term continued growth of the West Shore, including all our new small business jobs. Thanks to all those in the provincial cabinet that saw the importance of this decision for this fast growing and business- friendly community.

While it is long overdue, it shows what can happen when communities come together and fight the good fight, however many years it takes.

Healthy schools means a healthy community for the West Shore.

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