

Public can help plan new high schools

By Goldstream News Gazette

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In October 2011 the provincial government announced its commitment to construct two new secondary schools in the Sooke School District to replace the aging Belmont secondary.

Residents welcomed this announcement to address growing pressures in one of the province's fastest growing communities.

We, as a community, have an incredible opportunity to shape the future development of these new educational facilities.

The SD 62 board of education is now in the process of meeting with local organizations and community groups to hear their thoughts on potential educational programs and community needs.

Of particular interest is how the school district and community can best take advantage of a new program through the Ministry of Education for Neighbourhood Learning Centres. This program allows schools to incorporate up to 15 per cent additional space in the new schools for services or programs that address community needs.

This offer of space is open to a wide range of community service groups. The main criteria is the use meets community needs in a way that is compatible with school operations, and is sustainable and revenue neutral.

Examples from Neighbourhood Learning Centres in other communities include: family support centres, medical services, daycare, community theatre, athletics, youth drop-in and post-secondary programs.

This is a wonderful opportunity to expand community services and enhance our two new secondary schools, one to be located at the Glen Lake site in Langford and the other at Royal Bay in Colwood.

Both schools are intended to provide comprehensive graduation programs for students in grades 9 to 12.

Interest has already been expressed for the creation of a theatre at the Royal Bay site and Langford has proposed additional athletic facilities at the Glen Lake site. The question of what to name the two schools also needs to be considered.

In early March community organizations participated in two workshops to identify community needs and prepare a list of options. These will be considered by the broader community at public information open house sessions planned for March 28, 29 and 31.

These sessions are open to the public and we encourage all residents to come out and learn more about proposed programs and site development considerations, and express their views and preferences.

We recognize that this is a complex process, but at the same time, see the unique opportunity being presented for the community to have a strong voice in shaping the future of education in the Sooke School District.

Your views and the options selected by the community will be reflected in the detailed capital project plan to be taken forward to the Ministry of Education in order to receive final approval for the two new secondary schools.

The result of our planning together will be two vital new high schools to meet the needs of our community

for the next 50 years.

Please join in this important conversation by attending one of the open houses in the Belmont secondary north gymnasium: Wednesday, March 28, 5 to 8 p.m.; Thursday, March 29, 5 to 8 p.m.; and Saturday, March 31, noon to 3 p.m.

This is a drop-in/open house format, so come on the date and time that suits you and stay as long as you like.

Learn more about our new secondary schools by visiting www.sd62.bc.ca/Schools/NewSecondarySchools.aspx. Email ideas and comments about the new schools project to newschools@sd62.bc.ca.

—Wendy Hobbs is the trustee chair of the SD 62 board of education.

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