

Vancouver DPAC

Acting Chair

Nathan Wilkes

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8 March 2017

Trustee Dianne Turner

School District #39
1580 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8

Dear Trustee Turner,

BC Hydro recently proposed (see SEED website at <https://www.bchydro.com/energy-in-bc/seed.html>) to install a substation underneath Lord Roberts Annex in return for funds that could be used to build two schools, one at Lord Roberts Annex and one at Coal Harbour. In order to learn about Vancouver parents' views on the matter, Vancouver DPAC members attended public sessions hosted by BC Hydro, talked to parents at PAC meetings, obtained survey results from Vancouver PACs, and hosted a DPAC meeting devoted to the BC Hydro proposal.

The overwhelming concern expressed by parents is whether children will be safe attending school close to significant amounts of electricity (due to electric and magnetic fields at low frequencies, often abbreviated as "EMF"). Some parents were skeptical about the validity or applicability of health studies that have been performed and referenced. DPAC is pleased that a letter from Vancouver Coastal Health has been published as an independent viewpoint:

<https://www.bchydro.com/content/dam/BCHydro/customer-portal/documents/projects/seed/seed-letter-fraser-vancouver-coastal-health-february-2017.pdf>.

It should also be noted that many parents questioned the compressed timeline demanded by BC Hydro, commenting that if true this displayed poor project planning and if false represented questionable motives and integrity of process.

The Vancouver DPAC survey results, while informational rather than statistically valid (sample was not random), were presented at the February 23, 2017 DPAC meeting. There were approximately 1/3 Vancouver PACs who responded, and safety was expressed as the principal concern, although a significant portion of PACs also objected to the proposal on principle, that being that the slippery slope towards more public/private partnerships and a lessening of Ministry responsibility and accountability is not supported. When asked whether the PACs would support the project, almost 1/2 were "undecided", while 1/3 said "no", and the rest said "yes" or "yes with increased benefits". In terms of school design priorities, should the project move forward, the top three priorities were "art or music rooms", "enough capacity" for projected population growth, and a "school library".

Vancouver DPAC recommends that the Vancouver School Board consider the following:

- Obtain independent, reliable, trustable health safety expert advice regarding EMF that specifically addresses the proposed distances and length of exposure between the proposed Lord Robert Annex school site and the substation location.
- Ensure that the compensation for the lease is sufficient to build appropriate schools for the 21st century learning, at the projected costs at the time of construction, and sustain them over their lifetime.
- Ensure that the overall compensation should benefit the students of today and of the future in return for accepting the risk of the substation. In other words, the benefit is more than “just a school” which would be built anyway (at some point).
- Ensure that building extra student capacity downtown does not diminish the urgency or ability to address seismic and maintenance issues throughout the rest of the Vancouver school district.
- Ensure addressing secondary school capacity downtown (due to the increased primary school capacity) is included in the funding plan.
- Ensure regular EMF testing is funded over the length of lease term.
- Consider delaying the decision to allow for more comprehensive evaluation (and definition) of the proposal and risk analysis.

Sincerely,

Nathan Wilkes
Acting Chair, Vancouver DPAC