



Memorandum

vancouver school board



Date: March 24, 2017

ITEM 2

To: VBE Official Trustee

From: Guy Bonnefoy, Secretary Treasurer

Re: BC Hydro SEED Proposal - Update

INTRODUCTION:

This report is provided for information.

BACKGROUND:

BC Hydro approached the Vancouver School Board (VSB) with a proposal to construct an underground substation below Lord Roberts Elementary School Annex, on VSB property. The proposal includes the construction of a new Coal Harbour Elementary School, to accommodate students through construction, as well as the construction of a replacement elementary school at the Lord Roberts Annex site.

BC Hydro undertook an engagement process on their proposal which they called SEED. Due to VSB's potential implications in SEED, VSB also undertook an independent communication and engagement process with its corresponding school communities and stakeholder groups. A review of that engagement is appended.

VSB also commissioned an independent researcher, Dr. Ray Copes, to conduct an independent analysis on the effects of electro-magnetic fields (EMF).

The Board was to determine before the end of March whether or not to participate in principal with BC Hydro's SEED proposal.

However, before a final decision could be reached, BC Hydro withdrew the proposal. In a statement posted to the BC Hydro website on March 9, 2017, President and CEO Jessica McDonald stated that while BC Hydro had hoped to pay a one-time lease fee lower than the market value of the land at the annex site, the City of Vancouver had requested that BC Hydro pay a lease fee "based on what it would cost to purchase the land outright."

In the press release, BC Hydro stated it hope to lessen the cost of the lease by returning the use of the above-ground land to the lessor, as well as provide additional community benefits. With respect to VSB, this included the proposed two new schools in Coal Harbour and at the current annex site, respectively.

As construction of an underground station is more expensive than the construction of an above-ground substation, BC Hydro stated that it was no longer a responsible proposal to pursue and correspondingly cancelled the development of SEED.

Costs incurred by VSB in investigating the feasibility of the SEED Proposal will be reimbursed by BC Hydro (final costs still to be determined).

As BC Hydro has cancelled the development of SEED, VSB will no longer pursue this proposal.

Summary report of Vancouver School Board consultations with respect to BC Hydro's Seed Proposal

INTRODUCTION:

This report is provided for information. In January 2017, BC Hydro approached the Vancouver School Board (VSB) with a proposal for VSB to become a potential stakeholder in a process aimed at updating and expanding BC Hydro's energy infrastructure in downtown Vancouver. The proposed plan was titled 'SEED'. BC Hydro undertook a consultation process in January and February on the SEED proposal. VSB participated in those consultation sessions, notably the ones relating to the West End. However, to ensure VSB stakeholders were fully engaged in the issues directly related to the district's decisions on SEED, VSB undertook an independent communication and engagement process with its corresponding school communities and stakeholders. The consultation process was aimed at better understanding the priorities, challenges and opportunities of the West End school communities with respect to the SEED proposal.

The following report provides background on BC Hydro's proposal to VSB, and documents the independent consultation process VSB undertook with its internal stakeholders. Additionally, this report captures VSB's attendance at the independent community consultations undertaken by BC Hydro as part of their proposal's development. Finally, this report summarizes the formal and informal feedback VSB received during its consultation process, and captures BC Hydro's cancellation of the project proposal.

BACKGROUND:

What was SEED?

BC Hydro's SEED proposal was an endeavour to locate two electrical substations underground in downtown Vancouver. The purpose of the project was to replace aging infrastructure as well as increase capacity to meet growing electricity demands downtown. BC Hydro framed the project as highly innovative in that once the substation construction was complete, only a minimal amount of surface spatial impact would occur - as opposed to the impact of constructing the entire substation above ground.

How and why did SEED come about?

Due to the cost and scarcity of land in the downtown peninsula, BC Hydro examined alternative construction approaches to meeting its infrastructure needs. BC Hydro sought opportunities where it would not have to buy land outright, but could lease

underground space and return the above ground area to the lessor for their further use. To support this approach, BC Hydro sought a 99-year lease in exchange for a one-time fee. One of the sites BC Hydro proposed for this exchange was beneath Nelson Park and the Lord Roberts Annex Elementary School (the annex).

Through a one-time fee in exchange for the lease, SEED proposed to invest savings from the land-purchase costs into local communities. Financial negotiation details were not made public, however, BC Hydro messaging on the project focused on how its cost savings would be utilized to provide additional community amenities.

What were SEED's implications for VSB?

With the Lord Roberts Annex Elementary School and Nelson Park identified as a potential site, BC Hydro's proposal had a number of implications for VSB. These implications included the demolition of the annex to facilitate underground substation construction, the construction of a new elementary school in Coal Harbour to accommodate annex students, and the reconstruction of a replacement elementary school at the annex site following completion of the substation construction.

While SEED was a BC Hydro led and developed initiative, it required the approval of numerous stakeholders, including VSB. As a result, SEED sought to provide the district with benefits that would warrant the challenges associated with the proposal. For example, the construction of state-of-the-art facilities were included as part of the SEED proposal.

What was VSB's response to this proposal?

In response to BC Hydro's SEED proposal, VSB undertook a number of processes. These included providing information to internal stakeholders, attending BC Hydro consultation events, hosting independent consultation events with the impacted school communities and VSB stakeholders, and conducting an independent analysis on the effects of electro magnetic fields (EMF).

VSB engagement events focused on the implications of SEED and understanding the issues, concerns and opportunities of most importance to VSB's school communities. They provided an opportunity for stakeholders to be heard and for their feedback to be collected. This feedback has been captured as part of this report.

DISCUSSION:

The following section outlines VSB's consultation and engagement efforts undertaken in response to BC Hydro's SEED proposal, as well as the key themes garnered through community feedback. The section also includes: the chronological process to date, formal stakeholder feedback and informal stakeholder feedback.

a) Process to Date:

January 19, 2017: VSB district staff introduced BC Hydro SEED proposal at meetings with Parent Advisory Council (PAC) executives and staff at Lord Roberts Elementary and Lord Roberts Annex

January 19, 2017: VSB district staff introduced BC Hydro SEED proposal to stakeholder presidents

January 20, 2017: BC Hydro publicly announced SEED proposal

January 25, 2017: VSB staff hold meeting with annex playground committee

January 31, 2017: BC Hydro hosted West End community roundtable, with VSB staff and official trustee in attendance

February 1, 2017: BC Hydro hosted Yaletown open house event, with VSB staff in attendance

February 2, 2017: BC Hydro hosted Yaletown community roundtable, with VSB staff in attendance

February 8, 2017: BC Hydro Seed proposal presented at elementary school PAC meeting

February 9, 2017: VSB staff hold meeting with annex playground committee

February 9, 2017: BC Hydro Seed proposal presented at annex PAC meeting

February 15, 2017: BC Hydro hosted West End community roundtable with VSB staff and official trustee in attendance

February 16, 2017: BC Hydro hosted Yaletown community roundtable, with VSB staff in attendance

February 18, 2017: BC Hydro hosted West End community open house, with VSB staff and official trustee in attendance

February 22, 2017: BC Hydro hosted Yaletown open house event, with VSB staff in attendance

February 23, 2017: VSB district staff presented BC Hydro Seed proposal at District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) meeting

February 28th, 2017: VSB district staff and official trustee hosted meeting with parents from elementary and annex to report back on key themes, priorities, challenges, and opportunities heard throughout proposal process

March 8th, 2017: VSB district staff, official trustee hosted meeting with stakeholder presidents where BC Hydro President and CEO discussed SEED proposal

March 9th, 2017: BC Hydro President and CEO, Jessica McDonald, announced that plans for Seed had been cancelled and the project would no longer be going forward

b) Formal Feedback:

Through successive meetings with the affected school communities, VSB collected and summarized input and feedback on BC Hydro's SEED proposal. That feedback was summarized and reported back to parents at a final meeting to ensure accuracy and that the views of the community were properly captured. The following summarizes the process taken and key themes from public comments.

What we did:

In response to BC Hydro's SEED proposal, VSB engaged and met directly with its internal stakeholders to determine their priorities as well as perceived challenges and opportunities with the proposal. This process included informational meetings and letters, PAC, PAC executive and DPAC presentations, attendance at BC Hydro consultation events, annex school playground committee meetings, as well as a final, facilitated check-in meeting with the annex school community. VSB also met with stakeholder presidents to introduce the proposal and to provide additional information and gather feedback after BC Hydro completed its consultations.

Throughout this process, BC Hydro simultaneously held independent consultation events with the broader downtown community. VSB representatives were in attendance at each BC Hydro event to summarize feedback received and speak directly to the downtown school communities.

As part of VSB's report back to the Lord Roberts community, VSB hosted a final, facilitated presentation to the annex PAC. The presentation summarized BC Hydro's proposal, as well as key themes VSB had heard expressed in feedback. Attendees were provided the opportunity to ask questions of district staff and of Official Trustee Turner, as well as provide written feedback on the themes in general.

What we heard:

Throughout the process of meeting with VSB stakeholders, four major themes emerged from public comments and feedback: community value, health and safety, transparency and accountability, and playground plans.

With respect to community value, stakeholders wanted assurance that their neighbourhoods would benefit. The importance of the proposed day care spaces,

improved park and play areas, construction of state-of-the-art school facilities, and improvements to King George Secondary were identified. Additionally, feedback focused on whether VSB was getting enough compensation for the project, as well as guarantees about how that compensation would be earmarked for the community.

On health and safety, public feedback largely focused on EMF. Feedback highlighted a desire by stakeholders to better understand EMF as well as have VSB undertake an independent EMF study on potential impacts at the site. Feedback also emphasized the need to understand how BC Hydro's efforts would minimize EMF. In terms of safety, feedback emphasized the need for adequate plans to address emergencies scenarios.

Public feedback on transparency and accountability emerged out of a desire to ensure BC Hydro follows through on delivering proposed community benefits and guarantees the school's compensation will be spent in the West End. Feedback also identified a desire to know about how and when VSB decisions are taking place. Stakeholders wanted to better understand BC Hydro's proposed process and VSB's role within, as well, they wanted an opportunity to discuss what future playground and school spaces might look like.

The final theme from the public feedback process focused on plans for the new playground in the annex grounds. Feedback identified a desire to ensure the current playground plans move forward, that the generosity and the donor family was honoured, and that the equipment would be reinstalled after construction was complete.

Checking in with Lord Roberts Elementary and Annex parents:

On February 28, 2017 these four themes were presented to parents from Lord Roberts Elementary and Annex. Parents had the opportunity to ask any outstanding questions they may have had, as well as correct or adjust any misunderstandings in the themes and provide additional comments.

At this session, parents showed a strong interest in VSB's contract negotiations. In particular, they expressed a desire for VSB to ensure BC Hydro would work with them on the design of the proposed replacement school at the annex site, as well as on any future maintenance, testing or upgrading at the site.

Parents also wanted to specify certain logistics in any contract VSB signed; namely, they wanted assurance construction at the annex site would not begin until the proposed new Coal Harbour school had been completed and was ready to accept students from the annex.

Finally, parents felt that the consultation process was being constrained by the time limits BC Hydro had established for negotiations. Parents felt that this left the

community in a position where it was under informed, as well as that this short timeframe would give BC Hydro the upper hand in negotiations.

Following VSB's check-in with annex and elementary school parents on February 28, 2017 the key themes from the engagement process were validated. As a result, these themes now form the basis from which to understand the school communities' perspective and priorities with respect to BC Hydro's SEED proposal.

c) Informal Feedback:

During the consultation process VSB also received feedback outside the mechanisms established to collect input from the Lord Roberts Annex and Elementary School communities. While the BC Hydro events focused on the broader public, VSB's meetings aimed to hear directly from members of its Lord Roberts communities. However, broader public feedback was received and has been captured in this report.

Letter from the Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC):

On March 8, 2017, acting chair of the Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), Nathan Wilkes, summarized the perspective of DPAC on the Seed proposal in a letter to VSB Official Trustee Diane Turner. The letter noted major concerns expressed by parents to DPAC. The focus of these comments revolved around health and safety, specifically with respect to low frequency EMF exposure.

The DPAC letter also summarized findings from DPAC's survey of Vancouver PACs. The survey had a response rate of approximately one-third of Vancouver PACs returning results. Of those who responded, safety was identified as the principal concern. Additional concerns included school construction funding, community benefits and facility amenities. DPAC also provided a number of recommendations for VSB to consider as part of its decision making process.

Letter from Lord Roberts Annex staff:

On February 27, 2017, the staff at Lord Roberts Annex, including members of CUPE and VETSA, sent a letter to VSB regarding the BC Hydro SEED proposal. The letter begins with a clear statement: "[w]e would like to advocate for keeping Lord Roberts Annex a primary school". They identified a number of operational and functional aspects they felt were beneficial to students and should be maintained going forward. These include benefits for special needs students, struggling students and the utilization of the district's early intervention model. All members of staff signed the letter.

Letter from West End Families in Action:

On February 20, 2017 in response to BC Hydro's SEED proposal, West End Families in Action (WEFA) and the Lord Roberts Annex made a number of requests of VSB in the form of an open letter. They identified their primary concern as regarding the extent of benefits VSB would receive in exchange for participating in the proposal. They also expressed concern regarding the timing of the proposal's consideration, guarantees for funding, and ongoing parental involvement in VSB decision-making. Additionally, WEFA outlined a number of specific requests representing the themes of health and safety, construction and community amenities. A full description of each of their requests can be read online at

<https://wefavancouver.wordpress.com/2017/02/20/joint-community-letter-re-bc-hydro-seed-proposal/>.

Misc. letters:

On February 16, 2017, a concerned parent submitted some of their major concerns with respect to construction in a letter addressed to the annex PAC president. As the letter was regarding the BC Hydro SEED proposal it was forwarded to the VSB district staff and the official trustee. The letter identifies the parent's concerns, including timelines for decision-making and construction management.

CONCLUSION:

Following the completion of VSB's consultation process, a series of reports including this engagement summary were to be presented to Committee II and the VSB Board for decision-making. VSB was to determine before the end March whether or not to participate in principal with BC Hydro's SEED proposal.

However, before a final decision could be reached, BC Hydro withdrew the proposal. In a press release posted to the BC Hydro website on March 9, 2017, President and CEO Jessica McDonald stated that while BC Hydro had hoped to pay a one-time lease fee lower than the market value of the land for their underground substations, the City of Vancouver had requested that BC Hydro pay a lease fee "based on what it would cost to purchase the land outright."

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