

Frequently Asked Questions – BC Hydro proposal to VSB

June 7, 2018

Funding and Commitments

Q: What is this proposal about?

A: BC Hydro is proposing to upgrade and expand their electricity distribution capacity in downtown Vancouver to meet future demand. They have approached VSB to revisit last year's proposal to build an underground substation at the Lord Roberts Annex property in the West End. If approved, BC Hydro would acquire the rights to build a new substation underground at the Lord Roberts Annex property at a fair market price. This would provide VSB with funding to build a new Coal Harbour school sooner than expected and would allow for construction of a new elementary school at the Lord Roberts Annex site after the substation is complete. This would help address VSB enrolment pressure in the downtown area near the end of the next decade.

Q: Has VSB already agreed to this proposal?

A: The Vancouver Board of Education has not made a decision about this proposal. VSB has contracted a professional consultant with expertise in community engagement and public participation to produce a report outlining what has been heard during the community and school consultations. This report will be presented, along with the consultation report commissioned by BC Hydro, to trustees. The Board will review all the input from both reports, as well as relevant research and information prior to making a decision. The BC Hydro proposal will be discussed at Committee 2 on June 20, then be brought to the public Board meeting for a decision on June 25.

Q: How is this different from last year's proposal?

A: BC Hydro is discussing only one substation for the Lord Roberts Annex site, so the City and Parks Board are not involved in the negotiations at this time. If the proposal goes forward public consultation will be continue, including City and Park Board-led consultation to further explore impacts of underground power lines through Nelson Park.

Q: How much money would VSB get if the substation is built on our land?

A: Because this is a sensitive real estate issue, the financial details of the proposed deal cannot be disclosed publicly.

We've heard from parents and stakeholders that they want VSB to continue to pursue the Ministry of Education for a funding commitment to help build both a new Coal Harbour school and a replacement school on the Lord Roberts Annex site.

Q: If the deal proceeds, has the VSB committed to building a replacement school on the Lord Roberts Annex site? What commitments are there that both schools will be built?

A: The Coal Harbour school has been in VSB's capital plans for many years, and this year the Ministry of Education agreed to move forward with building that school. The Ministry of Education has confirmed that no Ministry funding will be advanced for the construction of Coal Harbour. Coal Harbour School will only proceed, at this time, if the BC Hydro proposal is approved by the Board.

Enrolment pressures in the West End mean we know a school is needed on the Lord Roberts Annex site. Our current plans would be to build a larger school than the current annex once the site is ready for construction.

Q: If the proposal moves forward, will BC Hydro pay for the installation of a synthetic turf field at the Lord Roberts Annex site?

A: During negotiations, which are not complete yet, BC Hydro has agreed to pay for the installation of a synthetic turf field, should the VSB request one, upon completion of the substation.

Q: Is VSB doing its own consultations before making a decision?

A: Yes. VSB held engagement sessions with parents at Lord Roberts Annex (May 23) and Lord Roberts Elementary (May 30) and has met with stakeholder groups and the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC). Information is available on a webpage at www.vsb.bc.ca/hydro_proposal_2018 and feedback is also accepted via email until June 10 at LRAproposal@vsb.bc.ca.

Q: What other consultations are taking place on this proposal?

A: BC Hydro has been consulting the community to provide further details and gather feedback about community support and concerns related to their proposal. They held meetings with stakeholders as well as public open houses in May. Full details of their consultation are available at www.bchydro.com/westendsub.

Q: What is BC Hydro's plan if the proposal does not move forward?

A: BC Hydro states: "Plan B for BC Hydro would be to purchase land in the West End and build a traditional, above ground indoor substation. This would be within a few blocks of Roberts Annex."

Health and Safety

Q: Is VSB doing its own studies of the impacts of having the substation under our school property?

A: A number of third-party technical and engineering studies were done last year, with input from VSB. Trustees will consider all information collected through these assessments, with a particular focus on student health and safety, in making any decision regarding this proposal. In addition, VSB commissioned an independent review of the risks from electric and magnetic fields.

Q: What are the risks of exposing students to the electricity in the substation under their school?

A: VSB is reviewing the risks associated in this proposal and will review all information prior to making any decisions. We are considering the impacts of electric and magnetic fields (EMF), and are looking at the risks that might come from fire, earthquakes, or other health factors.

BC Hydro has committed to additional safety measures for the substation, including:

- "Within park boundaries and VSB property, burying transmission cables deeper underground that we normally would and implementing magnetic field shielding by encasing the cables in steel. This will reduce the very low EMF levels even further (a minimum 75% reduction) and should alleviate the public perception of health risks from EMF.
- Commission an independent study of current EMF levels at the existing Lord Roberts Annex and Nelson Park, and report this to the public.
- Based on the final designs, confirm the EMF levels expected at the proposed substation sites, adjacent parks, and new Lord Roberts Annex and report this publicly.
- Commission an independent study to verify EMF levels once the substations are in-service and continue to monitor EMF levels and report publicly on an ongoing basis."

Q: Are there any other examples of a substation being built close to schools?

A: BC Hydro states: "BC Hydro has their infrastructure, including substations and transmission lines all over the province, often in very close proximity to homes, businesses, schools, parks and other public areas. A few examples we can provide of infrastructure close to schools include:

- Mainwaring Substation in Vancouver is approximately 80 metres from Sir Sanford Elementary.
- Highbury Substation in London, which is located less than 8 metres from the closest residence and 27 metres from Montem Primary School.
- Camosun Substation in Vancouver is approximately 100m from St Georges Senior School and 125m from Queen Elizabeth Annex.
- Campbell River Substation is located approximately 50 metres from Ecole des Deux Mondes."

Timeline and Construction

Q: How disruptive will construction of the substation be?

A: BC Hydro states: "We're committed to maximizing predictability and minimizing disruptions to local residents, businesses and commuters for all of our construction projects. In the West End, we'll work closely with the City of Vancouver, local businesses and residents to minimize the impact of construction to the neighbourhood. We have a strong track record of managing constructing projects within urban environments."

Q: What will happen to the students currently attending Lord Roberts Annex if construction begins on the substation?

A: If approved, construction on the proposed substation would begin once the Coal Harbour school is complete and ready to house students from Lord Roberts Annex. BC Hydro currently forecasts that they could begin construction at the annex site in 2023, and that the site could be ready for VSB construction of a new school on that site by 2028. Through consultations staff have been hearing that parents would like to see this timeline accelerated.

Q: What will happen to the staff and students at Lord Roberts Annex if this proposal moves forward?

A: If the proposal proceeds, the school community at Lord Roberts Annex and Elementary will be involved in discussions about accommodating any changes to their site and relocation of students and staff during construction, and as with any VSB school construction project, about the design of the new school.

Q: What about the playground recently installed at Lord Roberts Annex?

A: VSB will ensure that BC Hydro honours its commitment to work with the school to preserve the Annex's playground and reinstall it at a later date. BC Hydro has also stated that they will explore the possibility of locating the playground in a different spot during construction at their expense if the playground's donors feel that is appropriate.

Q: What would happen to the farmer's market currently running from May to October in Nelson Park?

A: The market is held in the park on land belonging to the Vancouver Parks Board. BC Hydro states: "While it's too early to say, should there be impacts to the West End Farmers Market, we'd work with the organizers to ensure that a suitable alternate location is found for the farmers' market during construction."