

1. SUMMARY:

LADYSMITH AND SOUTH NANAIMO FACILITIES PLAN

1.1 STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to prepare a long-range plan for school facilities in Ladysmith and the south end of Nanaimo. The plan documented in this report:

- ▶ Focuses on creating facilities that are efficient to operate and fully utilized.
- ▶ Provides an inclusive picture of the facilities required at the five, ten and fifteen year planning horizons.
- ▶ Reflects a thorough analysis of future enrolment, a solid understanding of existing facilities and carefully articulated educational priorities.

1.2 STUDY CONTEXT

Three secondary schools (John Barsby, Cedar and Ladysmith) serve students in Grades 8-12 from the south end of School District 68 (SD 68). Four elementary schools feed into each secondary school for a total of fifteen schools. Six of the elementary schools are K-7, two are primary schools (K-3) and two are intermediate schools (Grades 4-7).

Most of the schools are in reasonable condition but will require varying levels of investment to upgrade and renovate over the next few years. Two of the schools (Cinnabar Valley and Cedar) are quite new and two of the schools (Ladysmith Intermediate and South Wellington and) are in poor condition.

Previous forecasts indicated that enrolments were expected to decline for most of the schools in the south study area. The reduced utilization resulting from anticipated decreases in enrolment contributed to a proposal to close South Wellington Elementary, one of the schools in the Cedar group. A decision on the possible closure of South Wellington was postponed pending the outcome of this study.

The Ministry of Education's requirement to meet utilization thresholds as well as having maintenance funds linked with enrolment has focused on the need to optimize the use of all schools in the district. This new funding context makes it imperative that enrolment forecasts are as accurate as possible and that decisions regarding facilities are carefully considered.

1.3 FUTURE ENROLMENT

Our approach to estimating future enrolment for each school was to modify the base forecasts provided by Baragar Demographics with information

about planned new housing. We consulted with local government planners to estimate the number and type of new housing units to be built over the next 15 years.

The results of our enrolment forecasts can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ Overall enrolment in Grades 1-12 in the study area will decline slightly from just over 4,700 to approximately 4,600 by 2009 and then rebound to more than 5,300 by 2019.
- ▶ Secondary enrolment will decline slightly to 2014 and then rebound to current levels. All three secondary schools will have similar enrolment patterns.
- ▶ Elementary enrolment (excluding kindergarten) will remain essentially flat to 2014 and then increase to 2019.
- ▶ Enrolment will decline for some elementary schools (Bayview, Park Avenue, South Wellington and Chase River), remain essentially flat for others (North Oyster and Georgia Avenue) and increase for the remainder.

1.4 FUTURE UTILIZATION

Based on our analysis of future utilization, the following will happen unless there are some changes made to the existing facilities:

- ▶ Overall utilization of study area schools will increase from the threshold level of just over 95% to an estimated 108% by 2019. Even if enrolment were evenly distributed, the result would be crowded schools. The reality will be more challenging with some schools significantly overcrowded and other schools underutilized.
- ▶ There is sufficient capacity in the secondary schools, but additional capacity will need to be created for the elementary schools where the utilization will increase to 115% by 2019.
- ▶ There is already a need for more space in the Ladysmith area and there will be need in the future in the Cedar schools, but the Barsby family of schools will remain underutilized for the foreseeable future.
- ▶ Although overall utilization of secondary schools hovers around the 95% threshold, Cedar and Ladysmith have utilization levels of just over 100% while Barsby remains at around the 80% level.
- ▶ A few elementary schools will be overcrowded and need additional capacity (Cinnabar Valley, Ladysmith Primary/Intermediate and Davis Road) while utilization at other schools will diminish (Park Avenue, Bayview, Georgia Avenue, South Wellington, Chase River and North Oyster).

1.5 THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

We approached the development of the plan incrementally by focusing on the secondary schools and five geographically defined groups of elementary schools. Based on our analysis of the existing situation as well as future demand, we developed a plan that addressed the following key concerns:

- ▶ Increase the utilization at John Barsby Secondary.
- ▶ Provide new or expanded facilities to meet the growing need for elementary spaces in the Cinnabar/Chase and Ladysmith groups.
- ▶ Increase the level of utilization at North Oyster Elementary and the Barsby group of elementary schools.
- ▶ Replace, renovate or eliminate the two most deficient school facilities in the study area — Ladysmith Intermediate and South Wellington Elementary.
- ▶ Where possible, either eliminate or increase the size of the schools that are smaller than ideal — this applies especially to Davis Road and South Wellington Elementaries as well as Cedar Secondary.
- ▶ Convert the primary/intermediate schools to K-7 elementary schools where practical.
- ▶ Achieve or exceed the Ministry's 95% overall utilization threshold throughout the life of the plan.

1.6 THE EMERGING PLAN

The most important single project to be defined as part of the emerging plan is to replace Ladysmith Intermediate with a new K-7 school on a new site. This project should be pursued as soon as possible with a feasibility study that compares renovation with replacement. The identification of a site for a replacement school is also a priority.

Two other capital projects need to be pursued in the near future:

- ▶ The expansion of Cinnabar Valley Elementary.
- ▶ The expansion of Ladysmith Primary and conversion of the school to a K-7 elementary.

Three other facilities projects will need to be implemented in a few years:

- ▶ The expansion of Davis Road Elementary.
- ▶ The expansion of Chase River Elementary.
- ▶ The demolition of a small part of North Oyster as part of an upgrading and renovation project.

In addition, SD 68 will need to undertake the following non-construction actions to implement the emerging plan:

- ▶ Close South Wellington Elementary and send the students to Woodbank Primary and North Cedar Intermediate — this can be implemented next year.

- ▶ Transfer Gabriola Island secondary students from NDSS to John Barsby — this can be implemented when a plan for the use of the surplus space in NDSS is developed.
- ▶ Close one of Bayview, Park Avenue or Georgia Avenue Elementaries and adjust the catchment areas of the remaining two schools — this can be implemented in a couple of years after enrolment decline further and a process is followed to determine which school to close is completed.

Several elementary catchment boundaries will need to be adjusted as the plan is implemented. Several properties previously identified, as well as the land associated with two proposed school closures, can be sold and the proceeds used for a variety of purposes.

The situation after the plan is implemented can be characterized as follows:

- ▶ The schools will be well utilized (98% overall) with only North Oyster and Barsby will be operating below the 95% threshold.
- ▶ There will be fewer (10 instead of 12 schools), larger elementary schools (the average capacity of the elementary schools will increase from 225 to 288 spaces).
- ▶ There will be an improved quality of space.
- ▶ The proportion of the operating budget spent on facilities will have decreased.