



October 25, 2019

Janet Fraser
Chair, Board of Education
Vancouver School Board
1580 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8

Via Email: janet.fraser@vsb.bc.ca

Dear Ms. Fraser:

Re: Benefits to the Vancouver School Board (“VSB”) and the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (“CSF”) as a result of the closure and long-term lease to the CSF of Queen Elizabeth Annex

I write on behalf of the Board of Regional Trustees of the CSF, School District 93, to request that the VSB approve the closure of Queen Elizabeth Annex and proceed to the school closure public consultation phase. The CSF knows that proceeding to school closure is a difficult decision that requires careful consideration and scrutiny. After all, many families will be impacted by the decision. It is for this reason that the CSF writes to provide further information to the VSB Board of Education (“Board”) about the future use of Queen Elizabeth Annex and the benefits to both VSB and CSF communities.

As you know, the CSF is a provincially funded, public, French-first language school board, created in 1996 to fulfill the province’s obligations under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (“*Charter*”) to provide French-language elementary and secondary education in British Columbia. It is important to note that French-first language programming (provided by the CSF) is altogether different from French immersion programming (provided by the VSB). The CSF’s programming is intended for students whose parents are part of the Francophone

minority in Vancouver and who are eligible to attend a CSF school pursuant to stringent admissions criteria. French immersion programming, in contrast, targets the majority student population (families where no parent is Francophone) and where French is taught as a second (or third, or fourth, etc.) language.

The CSF's operations are very different from those of the 59 other school boards in the province as they are not bordered by municipal boundaries. Historically, municipal governments have not set aside land for the construction of CSF schools. When the CSF was created in 1996, old English-language school facilities were transferred or purchased from English-language school districts, such as the VSB, by the Ministry of Education to be used for French-first language education. To this day, the CSF relies greatly on the collaboration of English-language school districts, such as the VSB, to lease or purchase school facilities and sites in areas where it is starting a new program or where it is experiencing growth.

In Vancouver, the demand for French-first language programming has increased significantly over the last 20 years. Since its inception in 1996, the CSF and the VSB have worked together to identify potential surplus or underutilized VSB school sites and facilities that could be used to offer French-first language programming. The relationship between the VSB and the CSF has proven to be beneficial for both parties over the years. For example, in 2001, the CSF purchased a closed VSB school (at 5445 Baillie Street) from which it currently operates two schools: École élémentaire Rose-des-vents (K-6) and École secondaire Jules-Verne (7-12). In 2009, the CSF acquired a former closed VSB school (at 7051 Killarney Street) from which it currently operates École élémentaire Anne-Hébert (K-6). The CSF also currently leases three closed VSB school facilities (Maquinna Annex, Henderson Annex, and Laurier Annex), providing the VSB with regular and reliable rental payments for the use of its schools. However, the CSF desperately requires additional school sites in Vancouver, including west of Granville Street, and has been in discussions with VSB officials regarding the potential long-term lease of Queen Elizabeth Annex.

Background on CSF facility needs in Vancouver, west of Main Street

The CSF has been trying to acquire additional school sites in Vancouver, west of Main Street, since 2001. At the time, the CSF and the Ministry of Education knew that the site purchased from the VSB in 2001 (the current site of École élémentaire Rose-des-vents and École secondaire Jules-Verne) would not be large enough to accommodate the projected enrolment in the medium to long term.

Since 2001, the CSF has explored many site options, trying to secure space from the City of Vancouver, the province, the federal government, the University of British Columbia, as well as from private landowners/developers. Those efforts were long, disheartening for students, parents and the Board, and ultimately unsuccessful.

In 2010, after years of overcrowding at École élémentaire Rose-des-vents and no realistic solution in sight, the Parent Advisory Committee (“PAC”) of École élémentaire Rose-des-vents sued the CSF and the Ministry of Education in order to secure new school sites to alleviate overcrowding, to improve accessibility to French-first language education, and to accommodate growing demand in Vancouver, both west of Granville Street and between Main and Granville Streets. The parents, supported by the CSF, argued that the École élémentaire Rose-des-vents facility discourages eligible parents from exercising their right to French-first language education. Long travel times (over one hour in some cases) to a facility from which the CSF cannot offer adequate educational programming (i.e. some makeshift classrooms with no windows and poor acoustics, dilapidated portables, rented space off-site in the basement of a church, no gymnasium, inadequate library, insufficient number of toilets, shared space with secondary students, no playfield, crowded playground resulting in increased injuries, increased costs as a result of additional supervision requirements, etc.) all contributed to the parents’ (and the CSF’s) frustrations and the conclusions of the British Columbia Supreme Court in 2012.¹

¹ *L’Association des parents de l’école Rose-des-Vents v Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique*, 2012 BCS 1614.

The CSF, in turn, also sued the Ministry of Education in 2010 seeking systemic changes that would allow the CSF to better respond to facilities crises and to secure school sites and facilities in a timely manner.

In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the lower court's 2012 decision, confirming that students in Vancouver west of Main Street, do not have access to the programming that they are entitled to and that additional space is required. In 2016, the Supreme Court of British Columbia reiterated the Supreme Court of Canada's conclusions.

The CSF and the Ministry of Education have been working to comply with the courts' orders. In doing so, they have reconvened site options and continue to try to secure at least two school sites: one west of Granville and another between Main and Granville Streets. The CSF and the Ministry of Education are working toward securing a site between Main and Granville Streets (although there is no facility on that site that would allow for immediate relief to parents of École élémentaire Rose-des-vents parents).

As for the site west of Granville Street, which is the subject of this letter to you, the CSF, the Ministry of Education and the VSB have been working to identify surplus space in VSB school facilities, which would allow the CSF and the Ministry to provide much needed French-first language programming (and relief to École élémentaire Rose-des-vents parents) in the near future.

The proposed long-term lease of Queen Elizabeth Annex for publicly funded French first-language programming

In the fall of 2017, the Ministry of Education proposed to the CSF and the VSB a collaborative approach to explore facilities planning options that could meet the needs of all parties. The parties discussed hiring Partnerships BC, an independent third party that would be charged with conducting an objective assessment of each of the parties' needs against the VSB's available options. The parties agreed on this approach and, in December 2017, Partnerships BC was engaged to conduct a multi-criteria options assessment for an elementary school for the CSF on the west side of Vancouver. The Southlands Elementary School site and the Queen

Elizabeth Annex site, both owned by the VSB, were identified as having the potential to meet the needs of both the VSB and the CSF.

Partnerships BC met individually with the VSB, the CSF, and the Ministry of Education to discuss the project, and to develop an understanding of each of the parties' objectives and related concerns. Project objectives and associated criteria were developed to evaluate the potential options.

As a result of this approach and subsequent analysis conducted by Partnerships BC, Queen Elizabeth Annex was identified as the option that most clearly met the requirements of the VSB and the needs of the CSF, namely urgently needed space for CSF programming and efficient and fiscally responsible use of surplus space by the VSB.

A win-win collaboration

There is no doubt that a long-term lease of Queen Elizabeth Annex will benefit CSF students. CSF students living west of Granville Street will finally have access to a facility that meets their immediate, basic needs (i.e. classroom space, a gymnasium, a library, a playfield, etc.). Additionally, many students will benefit from greatly reduced travel times (from over one hour to 30 minutes or less) to French-first language programming. Parents whose rights have been violated for years due to a lack of access to French-first language programming will finally be able to exercise them.

As for the VSB and its students, the closure and long-term lease of Queen Elizabeth Annex to the CSF will also result in many benefits. The VSB will generate and maximize lease revenue while ensuring that publicly funded resources continue to be used for public education purposes. A difficult decision, like the closure of Queen Elizabeth Annex, will result in cost-savings and more funding for students in classrooms. Leasing Queen Elizabeth Annex will also reduce the VSB's overall capacity utilization, which should assist the VSB in meeting Ministry of Education criteria for obtaining capital funding approvals for much needed projects.



The CSF is grateful for your consideration of its request and knows that school closure is not a decision taken lightly. The CSF, like the VSB, wants its students to have access to a facility that is conducive to learning, working and playing, so that all children in Vancouver get the education that they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marie-Pierre Lavoie', is written in a cursive style.

Marie-Pierre Lavoie
Chair, CSF

Cc: Suzanne Hoffman, Superintendent (VSB)
David Green, Secretary-Treasurer (VSB)
Michel St-Amant, Superintendent (CSF)
Sylvain Allison, Secretary-Treasurer (CSF)