

# Residences planned for Burnside Elementary

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An 88-unit development geared to moderate-income families is in the works for the grounds of the former Burnside Elementary School, thanks to the collaboration of the Greater Victoria school district, the City of Victoria and the Pacifica Housing Society.  
Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

An 88-unit development geared to moderate-income families is in the works for the grounds of the former Burnside Elementary School, thanks to the collaboration of the Greater Victoria school district, the City of Victoria and the Pacifica Housing Society.

A memorandum of understanding would see the city lease land on a portion of the Jutland Road school grounds to Pacifica for 60 years. Pacifica still has to secure funding, but has preliminary approval from B.C. Housing.

The rental development, to be built on land adjacent to the school, would have two- and three-bedroom units and include child-care and community spaces.

The school district's role would be to complete a seismic upgrade at the school, which was closed in 2006 due to declining enrolment.

The building would then reopen as the Burnside Education Centre and be home to programs relocated from the S.J. Willis Education Centre. That would make S.J. Willis available to students from schools undergoing seismic upgrades.

Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps said the plan for Burnside is among the most exciting projects to come up during her time in office.

"It's the beginning of a village centre, it's new childcare spaces which are desperately needed, community space," she said. "It doesn't get much better than this.

"It's one of those projects everyone should be jumping for joy about, and I certainly am."

Parking will be underground to preserve space for a range of activities, Helps said.

The focus on the Burnside facility has resulted from a lengthy consultative process involving the city and the school district, she said. "The city and the school district have been having conversations for upward of 10 years about harmonizing school property and city property."

Helps said that Pacifica's participation added to the scope of the plans. "Pacifica came forward and said they had a concept for housing there, and all of the pieces came together."

All aspects of the project fit with the Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan, but community consultation will take place, Helps said.

Preliminary work is underway on the school refurbishment, which is due for completion by Christmas.

The district had planned to undertake the seismic refit last year, but estimates for the work came in at about \$6.2 million, more than it could afford. The partnership with the city and Pacifica brings added funding, making the refit possible.

"Being able to work with the city allows us to get those extra dollars that will bring [Burnside] up to its full potential," said Greater Victoria school board vice-chairman Tom Ferris.

"It was totally out of our reach, so we really needed go out and look for an alternative way to make this project happen."

Ferris said the most important element of improvements to the school will be the ability to offer students "a first-class environment" in a building that dates to 1912. "We'll have adult students here, we'll have students who are trying to complete their Grade 12, we'll have alternative students who just need a better environment to work in."

Ferris said the future could also bring changes to S.J. Willis, which was closed as a school in 1983. "If you look at the growth in our district, I wouldn't be surprised if one of these days S.J. Willis returns to its former status as a full-time school."

A community meeting about the housing proposal will be held Feb. 26 at 6:30 p.m. at the Burnside Gorge Community Centre.

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