

# Hundreds attend open house on Vic High's future

Jeff Bell / Times Colonist

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Options for Vic High, which is considered to be at high risk seismically, include upgrading the school or demolishing it and building a new one, with estimated costs ranging from \$50 million to \$110 million. Photograph By BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Victoria High School graduates and community members attended an open house to look at options for the venerable Fernwood school.

Saturday's event attracted 315 people, many of whom took guided tours of the school site.

The school, opened in 1914, is in poor seismic condition and is due to be demolished and rebuilt, seismically refurbished or renovated on the inside while retaining the historic exterior. Keeping the exterior is the most expensive option at \$100 million to \$110 million.

Kimberley Collis, a 2000 Vic High graduate, and her sister, Sherri, who graduated in 2002, dropped in to find out as much as they could about the next steps for the school.

"Just sort of seeing what the plan is with the changes that are happening, and what they're going to do with the building and what the public wants," Kimberley Collis said.

She said she would like to see at least some of the old structure kept.

"I love the feature where there's a boys and a girls entrance at the school."

The separate entrances signify how far back the school's history goes, she said.

"If there was a way to preserve some of those sort of funky, neat features, it would be pretty amazing. But, of course, it's not structurally sound for an earthquake, so it needs to be safe."

Sherri Collis lives in the Vic High catchment area and said she would love for her future children to attend the school.

Peg Orcherton, one of several Greater Victoria School Board members at the open house, said she graduated from Vic High in 1973 and is from a family with four generations of Vic High graduates.

She said the school means a lot to her.

“I’m trying to separate that a bit from the decisions that have to be made, but I get it when people are talking about the connection and wanting their children to come to their school.”

Ron McLean, a resident of the Vic High neighbourhood for about 40 years, said he has a fondness for the building.

“I see it as a beautiful landmark in our community,” he said. “It’s always been an additional benefit to the neighbourhood.”

He said the requirements of the students should be the primary concern when considering what to do with Vic High.

“But I think the students should be able to enjoy the history of the building, as well as being able to meet their future needs.”

School board chairwoman Edith Loring-Kuhanga said the public input will help give direction to board members.

“It’s a really tough decision that the board is faced with,” she said. “The school has such emotional connection to people who went here, even current students.

“We want to be open to the public, and we want to hear what they have to say.”

Loring-Kuhanga said she was encouraged by the size of Saturday’s crowd.

A second open house in the school gymnasium will take place April 18 from 5-7 p.m., at the school gymnasium, 1260 Grant St.

Input from the public, including from an online survey available at [www.sd61.bc.ca](http://www.sd61.bc.ca) until April 30, will be presented to the board in May.

A final decision could be made in June.

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