

School board backs \$73M option to save Vic High exterior

Jeff Bell / Times Colonist

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VICTORIA, B.C.: June, 25, 2018 - Exterior photo of the stands in front of Vic High in VICTORIA, B.C. June 25, 2018. (ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST). For City story by Stand Alone. Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

A 1,000-student facility complete with a seismic upgrade and a neighbourhood learning centre was chosen as the preferred option Monday night for aging Victoria High School.

The estimated cost is \$73,322,302 and would include retaining the school's exterior and some interior heritage aspects. The learning centre would house community programs.

The Greater Victoria school board unanimously supported the choice, recommended in a report by district superintendent Piet Langstraat. Ultimate approval for what happens to the school, opened in 1914 and currently home to 800 students, now rests with the B.C. Ministry of Education.

The ministry will do a final review of the project and analyze the option suggested. A decision on the level of provincial funding will follow and could come by mid-September or early October.

Fears that Vic High might be levelled galvanized considerable support to preserve it, with Victoria High School Alumni Association members leading the way.

School board trustees responded in May by putting an emphasis on choices that would maintain part of the existing facility — the oldest North American high school west of Winnipeg and north of San Francisco.

The most recent options for Vic High, rated at the top level of seismic need for schools, included a \$61.1-million seismic upgrade with room for 800 students.

Trustees also considered a \$67.9-million option for a new school that would involve demolition.

Alumni association member and former Vic High principal Keith McCallion said his group is happy with the school board's vote.

"I think clearly we're very pleased," he said outside the meeting. "We get the best of both worlds here, that's what we wanted all along — preservation and a wonderful new facility for the current students and those kids coming in later years."

The school district held public sessions in March and April to gather input on options for Vic High. That, combined with an online survey, involved about 1,700 people.

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