

School board leaning toward renovating, rather than demolishing Vic High

Jeff Bell / Times Colonist

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The prospect that the 1914-vintage school in Fernwood — which has a high need for seismic work — might fall to the wrecking ball has generated a lot of concern in the community.

Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Greater Victoria school trustees are leaning toward renovation rather than demolition of Victoria High School, says trustee Jordan Watters.

The prospect that the 1914-vintage school in Fernwood — which has a high need for seismic work — might fall to the wrecking ball has generated a lot of concern in the community.

Watters said a trustees committee met Monday and considered input from an online survey and open houses. They decided to ask for a report detailing two options for Vic High: one involves seismic upgrades and repairs for \$60 million to \$70 million, the other maintains the facade and rebuilds the interior for \$100 million to \$110 million.

Both options would produce a school for 850 students.

A third option would see the existing school demolished and replaced with a new 1,000-student facility at a cost of \$50 million to \$60 million.

“This is setting a clear direction that the board doesn’t see demolition as a viable option,” Watters said of the committee’s decision. “Obviously, this was a committee vote so it will go to the board at the end of the month, but I think it’s pretty clear where the wind is blowing on this in terms of what the community wants.

“They’ve spoken loud and clear.”

School board vice-chairman Tom Ferris agreed that people are clearly concerned about heritage values.

“Obviously, the board has to make up their own mind, but on the other hand, if a fairly large preponderance of people are concerned about the heritage aspect of the building, then we need to take that into consideration.”

Members of the Victoria High School Alumni Association attended Monday’s committee meeting and spoke about their desire to recognize the school’s history.

Association member Keith McCallion, a former Vic High principal, said the group was happy with the meeting’s outcome. He said it wants to maintain part of the past while making needed improvements to Vic High.

“We certainly don’t want it to be stuck forever 100 years ago, with its defects,” he said. “We want to see it modernized and upgraded. It needs to be for the kids of now and into the future.”

The provincial government has the final say in what will happen to Vic High. If money were to become an issue, McCallion said, the alumni group would try to help.

“We’ve certainly indicated as an alumni association, and I think it came from the community, as well, that we’re anxious to sit down and start working with trustees to see what we can do about that.”

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