

THE CORPORATION OF THE  
**CITY OF WHITE ROCK**  
**CORPORATE REPORT**



**DATE:** March 8, 2021

**TO:** Land Use and Planning Committee

**FROM:** Carl Isaak, Director, Planning and Development Services

**SUBJECT:** 1273 Fir Street, White Rock Elementary School Expansion – Development Variance Permit (DVP 20-023)

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

THAT the Land Use and Planning Committee:

1. Recommend that Council direct staff to schedule the required Public Meeting for Development Variance Permit No. 436; and
  2. Recommend that Council consider approval of Development Variance Permit No. 436.
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

An application for a Development Variance Permit (DVP) has been received in support of a proposed eight (8) classroom expansion to White Rock Elementary School, located at 1273 Fir Street. The expansion extends the existing building toward the east (Fir Street) property line and has been designed to continue the established “top of ridge” of the School which requires relief from the maximum height standard set out in City of White Rock Zoning Bylaw, 2012, No. 2000. At the time the original building was constructed, the previous Zoning Bylaw did not have a maximum height for buildings in this zone. Staff have considered the feedback received from the public and the Applicant’s response to this feedback, in addition to applicable policies of the Official Community Plan and good planning principles. Staff recommend that the project proceed to a public meeting.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION**

Not applicable.

**INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

The City of White Rock has received a Development Variance Permit (DVP) application from the Board of Education of School District 36 (Surrey) (‘Applicant’) to add classrooms to White Rock Elementary at 1273 Fir Street. The property is designated Institutional in the Official Community Plan (‘OCP’) and is zoned Civic / Institutional Use (P-1) Zone in City of White Rock Zoning Bylaw, 2012, No. 2000 (‘Bylaw’). The Institutional designation in the OCP recognizes public or semi-public uses which serve the needs of the community. The Plan notes that the height and density of buildings will be based on their compatibility with surrounding development.

The application seeks relief from the maximum height permissions of the P-1 Zone to enable the construction of a 1,046 square metre (11,255 square foot) expansion to the east wall of the school. The Applicant has clarified that the immediate need for the expansion is to enable the relocation of students who are currently occupying portables on the west side of the school; there would be a minimal net increase to the level of student enrolment forecasted over the next 10 years. The portables would be removed concurrent with the construction of the addition. The variance, if approved, would permit a maximum building height of 12.4 metres to the “top of ridge” whereas the maximum height permitted in the P-1 Zone is 10.7 metres (i.e., relief of 1.7 metres or approx. 5.6 feet). The proposed “top of ridge” would continue the ridge line established by the existing school building.

The design of the school expansion includes a cupola (the “dome” type feature present in the existing building) which would have a maximum height of 15.7 metres (see Figure 1). Section 4.13.4 of the Bylaw allows exceedances from a maximum height standard for: “elevator shafts and stair towers that do not provide direct access to the roof; for antennas; for church spires, belfries and domes; for chimneys; for flag poles; and, for monuments; but no such structure shall cover more than 20 percent of the lot or, if located on a building, no more than 10 percent of the roof area of the building.” At the time of advertising the Public Information Meeting (PIM) the height of the cupola was recognized as being a component of the variance. However, on further review, staff have confirmed that the cupola is consistent in form and function with structures that are explicitly exempted from the maximum height provision (i.e., a church spire, belfry or dome) and therefore the cupola too is exempt from the maximum height limit. The Applicant has confirmed that the existing cupolas and the proposed cupola, together, would cover 3.4 percent of the roof area of the building and would therefore fall below the ten percent limit outlined in the Bylaw.

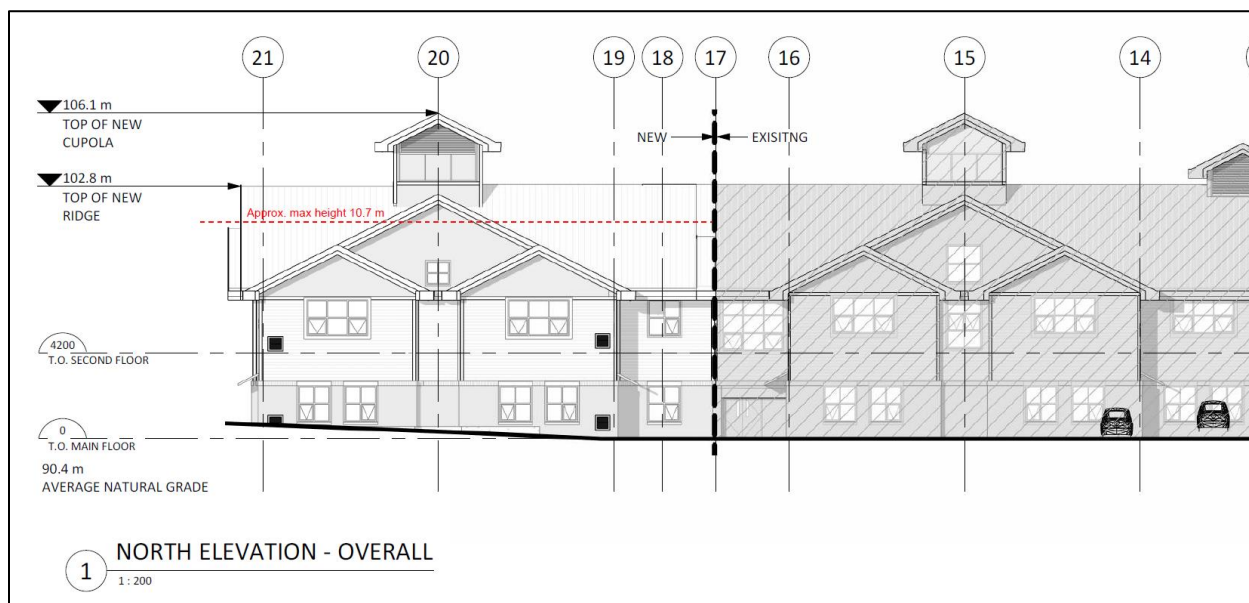


Figure 1: North Elevation – Illustration of Cupola and Top of Ridge relative to Existing School

### **Site Context**

The subject property is surrounded by a mix of commercial and residential uses (see Figure 2). Lands immediately northeast of the property, being those most likely to be impacted by the requested height variance, are comprised of three and four-storey residential apartment and townhome buildings (see Appendix A – Site Photos). To the northwest, lands are comprised of public parkland / utility uses as well as commercial (restaurant) uses, the latter of which front

onto Johnston Road. The property at 1310 Johnston Road (being at the northeast corner of Johnston Road and Roper Avenue) is zoned Comprehensive Development Zone 61 (CD-61). The CD-61 Zone allows for a maximum building height of six storeys.

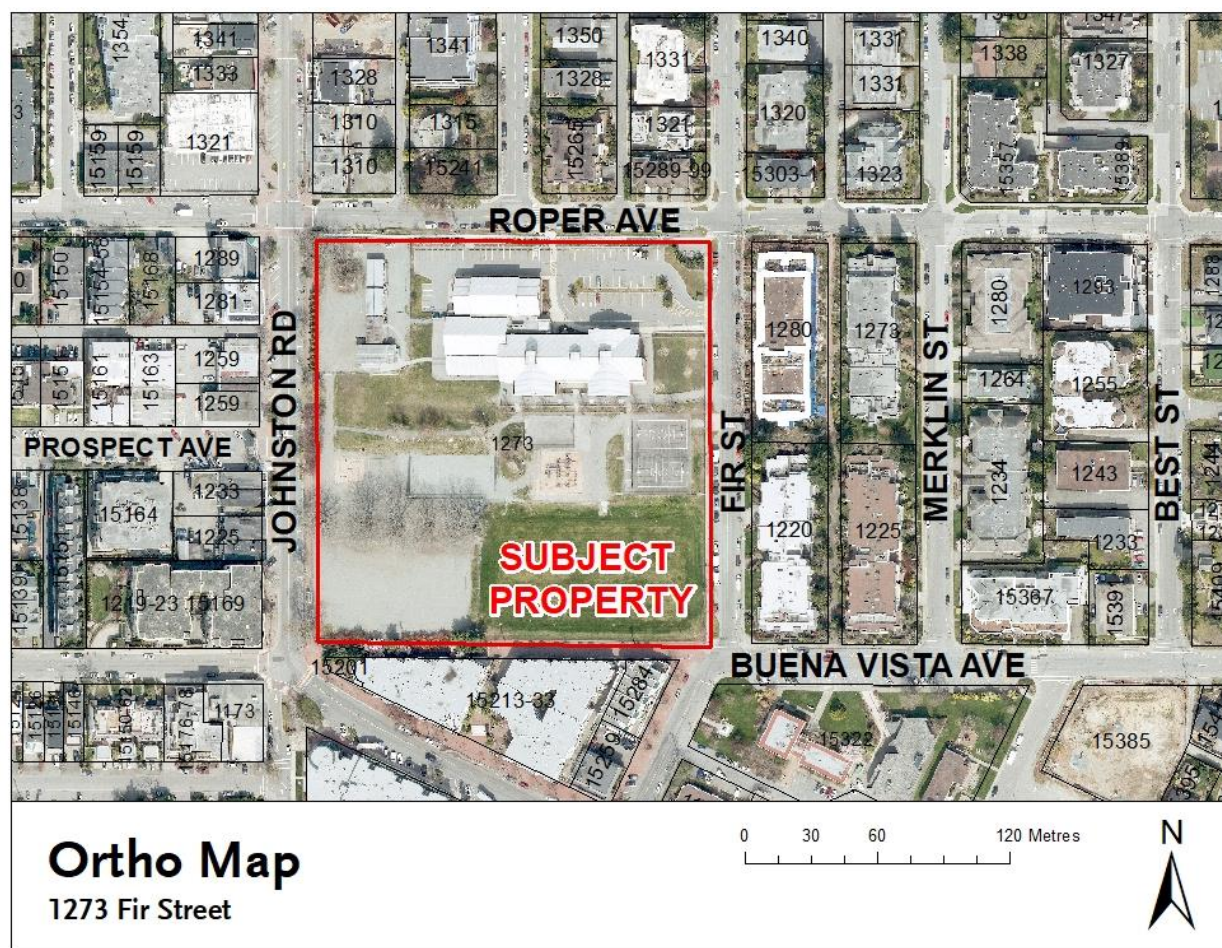


Figure 2: Aerial image of the subject property and abutting lands.

### Consultation with the Public

On February 3, 2021 a Public Information Meeting (PIM) was held to raise awareness of the proposal. Approximately 12 people attended the meeting. Digital feedback forms were advertised during the PIM and made available until February 19, 2021. A total of six forms were received with all respondents expressing concern with the proposal (see Appendix B - Feedback Forms). Issues raised include:

1. Opposition to the inclusion of a “cupola” with opportunity for alternate design (e.g., skylights) to enable solar gain within the addition;
2. Negative impacts to property value and related declining impacts to tax revenue;
3. Loss of view to the water and resultant decline in the use and enjoyment of the property;
4. Opportunity to utilize other portions of the site (i.e., parking lot, sports fields, and west side of site in location of existing portables);
5. Opportunity to accommodate a flat roof to reduce view-related impacts.

The Applicant has provided a PIM Summary which offers a response to the issues outlined above (see Appendix C). Since the hosting of the PIM, residents, parents, teachers, and others have provided email correspondence to staff expressing support for the proposal. At the time of

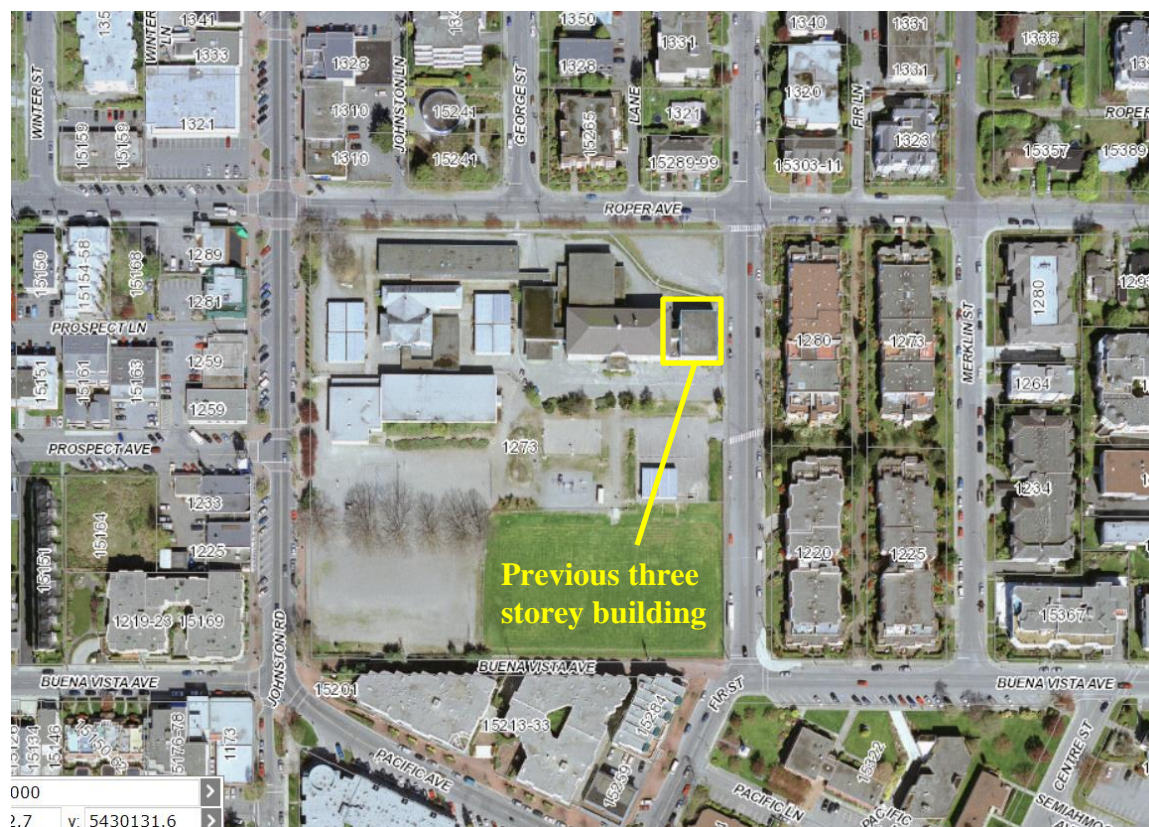


preparing this report, approximately 80 such emails had been received. In some instances, commenters voiced concern about the City’s decision to deny the application and/or delay the advancement of the proposal. In such instances, staff clarified that the project was currently under review and that interested stakeholders would have an opportunity to express their concerns / support directly to Council during a public meeting.

### **Analysis**

The properties northeast of the proposed addition, opposite Fir Street (east), and immediately south of the subject property are comprised of three-storey residential buildings, including both townhomes and apartment (strata) buildings. Considering the context, the height of the proposed school addition would be in keeping with the height of existing buildings in the immediate vicinity of the property. It is acknowledged that the addition will have an impact on the southward (water) views of residents living immediately north of the property. In evaluating this matter, staff have considered several factors given greater merit below.

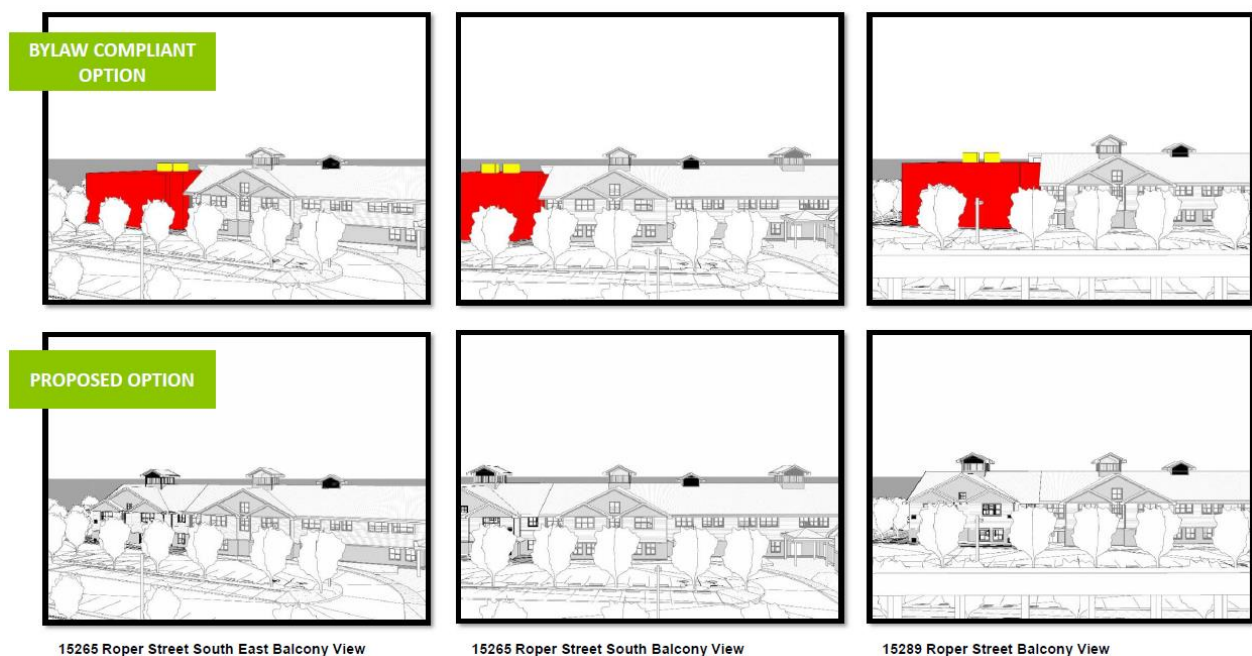
The subject property was redeveloped with a new school between 2005 and 2007. Prior to this, the property was occupied by several school buildings (constructed circa 1962) including a three storey building which was located on the same site as where the eight classroom addition is proposed; these buildings collectively covered a larger area than that of the existing school with the proposed addition (see Figure 3). This is offered as acknowledgement of the historic use of the property and how prior buildings would have also affected views in the area. While the two properties immediately northeast of the property were built prior to the demolition of the former school, one new townhome has since been built at 1321 Fir Street. Residents of these homes have expressed concern about the variance and the impact of additional height on their southward views. Design alternatives, discussed in the Applicant’s PIM Summary and further outlined in their Design Rationale (see Appendix D), provide a basis for the design, as proposed.



**Figure 3: Aerial Image of Former Peace Arch Elementary School (April, 2004)**

During the PIM, concerns were similarly expressed about the pitched roof design and the necessity of the cupola. The Applicant confirmed that the cupola not only brought light into the building but that the feature helped to ventilate the space, replacing the need for rooftop mechanical units. If the building was designed with a flat roof, the Applicant has provided that rooftop mechanical units would be required to support ventilation, heating and cooling. These mechanical units are considered a building feature similar to a “chimney” and are exempt from the maximum height provisions of the Bylaw (per Section 4.13.4). Taking this into account, while a flat roof design may reduce the height of the roof (i.e., from 12.4 metres as proposed to 10.7 metres as required), portions of this roof space would then be occupied by mechanical units which would have an impact on views and the overall aesthetic of the building.

Figure 4 below, prepared by the Thinkspace Architecture Planning Interior Design (‘Project Architect’) illustrates the differences between a flat-roofed building, with rooftop mechanical units, and the proposed pitched roof building with cupola. The illustration demonstrates the limited impact of the building, as proposed, on nearby views to the water. The drawing also highlights the aesthetic value to be gained from a design that continues the architectural aesthetic of the existing building into the addition. The Design Rationale provided by the Applicant notes that when the new school was being proposed, the City “requested/encouraged SD36 to create a design that maintained the form and character of the original 1914 school, respectful of the seaside community aspect of White Rock while paying homage to the history of the site as the long-term home of White Rock school”. Staff are supportive of the design in this regard.



**Figure 4: View Analysis Illustrating permitted building height (flat roof on top) against proposed, pitched, roof design**

One final factor considered by staff pertains to the planned programming of the property. When the school site was redeveloped with the current building the lands immediately east of the building were intentionally set aside to accommodate future expansion. Servicing connections, positioned to the west of the site, and the overall layout of facilities such as parking, pedestrian walkways and vehicle lanes, are designed to enable the addition without disruption to the overall function of the school. Had the entire building been constructed at the time of the current building, no height variance would have been required under the height provisions in the Zoning Bylaw at the time. Further, the current zoning bylaw establishes a 6 metre (approx. 20 foot) minimum yard setback, applicable to all the property’s boundaries. The design respects these

setbacks and enhanced landscaping has been proposed along the eastern limit of the property to buffer the new construction from nearby residential uses while enhancing the aesthetic of the site along the City's boulevard. A draft version of Development Variance Permit No. 436 has been included in this report as Appendix E. The Permit requires that future development be in substantial compliance with the designs submitted with the application.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not Applicable.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not Applicable.

### **COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

As noted, feedback received during and after the Public Information Meeting, has been considered in preparing this report and a draft Development Variance Permit for consideration by the City's Land Use Planning Committee and ultimately Council.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT/IMPLICATIONS**

The application was circulated to City Departments for review and comment. As noted, the intentional layout of the property, designed to enable an expansion of the building, has negated the need for any alteration to the proposal. There are no outstanding issues to be resolved as they relate to the DVP; it is noted that the City is in receipt of a building permit for the work.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

The ability to support a mix of uses and more intensive use of urban land lessens the need for outward sprawl which can bring increased reliance on the private automobile and other impacts (e.g., loss of farmland, destruction of wooded areas, etc.). Lower reliance on the auto can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, recognized as a leading contributor to climate change. Further, more intensive use of land, serviced by roads, sewers, and other community facilities, helps to preserve undeveloped (green) lands which can be used as a resource to support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

There is no specific project or Council Strategic Priority that this proposal aligns with.

Allowing for the construction of a permanent expansion to the elementary school as an alternative to portables is understood to offer a better learning environment for students and responds to growing enrollment in the White Rock and South Surrey area. The expansion to White Rock Elementary School will support the long term needs of White Rock families. The variance from maximum building height, if approved, would accommodate the continuation of the architectural design and character of the School with limited impacts to existing residents.

### **OPTIONS / RISKS / ALTERNATIVES**

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. Deny Development Variance Permit No. 436 and provide alternative suggestions to the Applicant on how the design could be revised to comply with City of White Rock Zoning Bylaw, 2012, No, 2000; or

2. Defer consideration of Development Variance Permit No. 436 and refer the application back to staff to address any issues identified by Council.

Either of the above alternatives would necessitate redesign of the building and ultimately delay its construction.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Board of Education of School District 36 (Surrey) has made an application for a development variance permit to support the expansion of White Rock Elementary School. The variance from maximum height, if approved, would allow for the continuation of the existing roof ridge thereby complementing the existing architectural aesthetic of the building. An evaluation of an alternative (flat-roofed) building designs demonstrates the limited impact of the proposal on views and the aesthetic benefits that may be realized with approval of the variance. Staff recommend that the proposal proceed to Public Meeting and that Council consider the issuance of the Development Variance Permit.

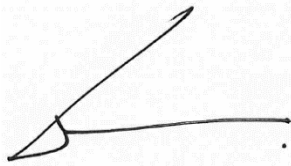
Respectfully submitted,



Carl Isaak, MCIP, RPP  
Director, Planning and Development Services

**Comments from the Chief Administrative Officer**

I concur with the recommendations of this corporate report.



Guillermo Ferrero  
Chief Administrative Officer

- Appendix A: Site Photos
- Appendix B: Feedback Forms
- Appendix C: PIM Summary
- Appendix D: Design Rationale
- Appendix E: Draft Development Variance Permit 436