

Village of Slocan – Presentation to the Board



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*In consultation with W.E. Graham
PAC*
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Village of Slocan – An Update!

- Springer Creek Forest Products shut down permanently in 2013. As a regional economic driver, the operation of and closure had an impact on the entire sub-region. *(By the time the mill actually closed, very few people from the Village/Subregion actually had economic ties to the mill.)*
- As a sub-region, we find ourselves transitioning from a primarily resource based economy into a more diversified existence.
- Although our region continues to supply a workforce to resource based industries, we also supply workforce to interior health, construction/trades, social services, eco tourism businesses, tech and knowledge workers and more. We are also home to many creatives, artists, musicians, and natural health practitioners.



The Future Looks Bright!

- Contrary to what many think, the demolition of the mill site has NOT resulted in diminishing population.
- Since the demolition of the mill, we have seen a transitioning and increasing population!
- Some Indicators of Growth this year alone:
 - Village has seen a significant increase in land sales/purchases – the majority by young families with children
 - A recently completed condominium project has seen most their 16 units occupied
 - We have also welcomed new business to town, including a thriving restaurant – and have accepted an offer from a Backcountry Ski Lodge to develop a storefront in our downtown core
- Other upcoming development projects include a senior's housing project, Micro-hydro renewable energy project, mountain bike trail development and a regional food centre.

Poised for Significant Growth

- The Village of Slocan is home to a 19+ acre waterfront property.
- Our Official Community Plan indicates that upon mill closure, we support mixed use of the site including commercial development, residential development, and park use
- The current owners are motivated to sell, and there is interest from serious investors
- Growth and economic development within the Village of Slocan, will benefit the entire sub-region, both to the North and to the South
- Located within the heart of the Village, it is **critical that the board understand that the closure of W.E. Graham would have a significant negative impact on the economic growth, not only of Slocan, but of the entire sub-region.**






Ouch! This hurts!!!

- Threat of school closure is extremely complex, emotionally charged, and tremendously unsettling to our valley.
- Threat of school closure has plagued the Slocan Valley for generations. Whenever it comes up, a community that is intimately interconnected socially, economically, and by our natural environment finds ourselves separating, dividing, and outlining differences rather than celebrating our similarities – and the incredible place that we call home.
- As a sub-region we know we have something special. Both of our schools provide incredible, intimate learning experiences, and are an integral part of our community. Closure of either school will be devastating.

Benefits of W.E. Graham as a central Slokan Valley sub-regional School

- On March 30th, the board presented a draft facilities plan proposing a closure of either Winlaw Elementary School or W.E. Graham Community School.
- Assuming that the board will move forward with the plan, the Village has prepared the following feedback on the benefits of keeping W.E. Graham Facility open as a sub-regional school, including the benefits that this will have to student learning, district parent/student choice, and sub-regional community and economic development.





How does maintaining W.E. Graham Community School as a K-8 + Valhalla Wilderness School add value to learning?

- Provides more options for SD8 learners
- Provides stability for all Slovan Valley elementary students.
 - A slightly larger cohort and unified sub-regional school will ensure stability in elementary configuration. *(Both schools have seen increases and/or decreases based on a variety of factors. Enrollment is a pendulum and at different points in time enrollment numbers have increased or decreased based on things such district catchment policy, school leadership, teacher popularity, destabilization from threat of school closures, stigma based on non-truths etc.)*
 - Maintains intimate learning environment that is very tied to the Slovan Valley community. Both schools currently provide intimate learning settings, outdoor learning experiences, and a healthy school community. This will be maintained, but within a larger sub-regional context.
 - Maintains access to a facility that allows for applied learning experiences such as cooking, woodwork, gardening, skateboarding, tennis, outdoor learning, community leadership experience such as serving at senior's lunch, music, art therapy, and more!

- Provides an unique option for SD8 middle-school learners
 - The program provides a welcoming entrance point to the district for home schooled children and Whole School students.
 - Provides applied learning experiences of the Outdoor Environmental Leadership program. (A strategic planning/transition process could identify other options such as Arts Academy/Leadership program, Young Agrarian/Food Centre programming, 7/8 French emersion ???)
 - Provides an intimate learning experience within a Slokan Valley context

- Valhalla Wilderness Program – a world class, placed base, integrated learning experience that is unique to the district, but also to the province. Outdoor Leadership training at its best!!! This program already attracts students from throughout the district. It would be a huge loss to the district to lose this program.



Enhanced Student Learning through Community Partnerships


- The Village of Slokan has always worked closely with the school to provide opportunities for learning in community.
- A few examples:
 - During our last Official Community Plan (OCP), every student in the school had the opportunity to learn about the process and to provide input.
 - Slokan Owl Walk and Outdoor Classroom space
 - Art in Community – every student participated in hand painting banners. These are proudly displayed on our main street!
 - Fall Food Fair and more!



Community Amenities that Enhance Student Learning


- The Village also provides amenities that teachers and students can access within walking distance
- A few examples:
 - Community Service Opportunities – Serving at Senior’s Lunches, Community Gardening
 - Owl Walk – Stewardship Agreement
 - Skateboard Park
 - Community Library – author readings
 - Springer Creek Waterfall Trails,
 - Soccer Field/Ballpark
 - Natural amenities, river, lake, Valhalla Provincial Park, rock climbing,
 - And much more!!





If the Board moves forward with the draft plan, what decisions(s) would you make for your family?

- The board needs to be aware that our community is in fight or flight mode. Asking this question at this time may not reflect reality. What we do know:
 - Maintaining WEG as sub-regional school will have the largest impact on families at the south end of the Winlaw catchment area and those attending WES from BK catchment. Some parents will choose the shorter bus route to Brent Kennedy, and this will have an impact on enrollment at that school.
 - However, we also know that parents don't always choose the school that is closest in location.
 - A thoughtful community building/strategic planning/rebranding/renewal process could likely maintain community attachment to the central Slovan Valley sub-region.
 - We also know that WES parents *DO* send their children north to access programs such as the after school program (90 seats) and summer camps offered through WEGCSS. This could be another data source for the board to consider.
- The board should also explore more efficient transportation options from the south end as this will enable more (district wide) options for more learners, and could alleviate pressures from the south.



If the draft plan is unacceptable to you, what would you do as a trustee to ensure revenue isn't being spent on capital needs, and is directed toward learning and environments for learning?

- With 50% of our valley schools undergoing major renovations in the past 15 years, it is unlikely that the ministry will provide funding for a rebuild or renovation when there are other schools in our district that also require attention and significant capital outlay.
- It is unacceptable that the board suggest a consider a rebuild of a school when there is an excellent facility 15 minutes up the road
- It is unacceptable that the board invest \$1,000,000 to increase space to a limited facility, when there is a facility that already has enriched features (library, cooking facilities, large gym, wood-working, science lab and more) and the space to house the students from the sub-region. It also has capacity for anticipated growth.
- There are many opportunities to partner with our community services, the Village and other organizations to improve the facility based on a strategic plan. As a trustee, I would ensure that there is clarity on how community partnerships can happen, including financial partnerships, rental agreements, and collaborative development projects. There is strength in collaboration!



If the draft plan moved forward, what are your suggested uses for the \$\$ savings?

- Strong commitment to provide stable learning environment with more than adequate staffing, for at least 10 years so as to provide time for transition and renewal.
- Strong commitment from the board to ensure staff and board involvement in a community wide strategic planning/rebranding process that will create a “new” school at the W.E. Graham Facility. A sense of renewal is critical.
- A strong commitment from the board to act on recommendations coming from the strategic planning/rebranding process



Concluding Remarks

- The Village is not advocating for a school closure in our valley. We currently have two excellent schools in the central Slokan Valley sub-region that serve us well.
- If the board is intent on moving forward with their draft facilities plan, the Village of Slokan strongly supports maintaining W.E. Graham as a sub-regional school. The facility supports the maximum potential for enriched learning experiences for Slokan Valley students. It will provide more options for SD8 students, teachers, and families. It maximizes the potential to respond to future change.
- With that being said, it is critical that the board, staff and Slokan Valley community have an opportunity to come together to create a “new” school that serves the specific wants and needs of our larger community. There is an opportunity to create something unique and special that celebrates the incredible valley we call home.