

For immediate release

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SD 71 acquires additional administration space freeing up classrooms

COMOX, VALLEY B.C. – Comox Valley Schools Board of Education has passed a bylaw authorizing staff to proceed with the purchase of a property from the BC Assessment Authority that will be used by the district for administrative purposes. The property is located at 2488 Idiens Way. The purchase is a cost-effective, timely option to address the need for administrative space in our growing district. The main goal of this purchase is freeing up much needed classroom spaces.

SD 71 is experiencing unexpected enrollment pressures and there are more housing developments underway throughout the valley, causing a need to quickly create classroom spaces. Currently administrative functions and educational programs are dispersed throughout the district in six different locations – which is neither effective nor efficient. Acquiring 2488 Idiens Way will allow SD 71 to consolidate some of these functions – moving them out of classrooms and modulars – and into appropriate office space. SD 71 will re-locate the current board office and administration to 2488 Idiens Way to make space in the 607 Cumberland Road location for district programs.

Purchasing modulars, instead of reclaiming school classrooms currently used for administration, would take significant funding from operating dollars rather than the capital reserves that have been set aside for this purpose.

In addition, many of SD 71's departments and programs require better spaces to meet their needs. For example, the Indigenous Education department requires a more appropriate space as their enrollment and staffing grows. The Inclusive Education department has moved three times in recent years and the school district needs the Airport Elementary classrooms where Inclusive Education currently resides.

SD 71 has been working on increasing administrative space for a number of years. In 2015-2016, SD 71 staff were working with staff from the City of Courtenay and the Comox Valley Regional District on the concept of an integrated shared office building. The discussions included a land swap and Land Purchase Triparty Concept. SD 71 decided not to proceed with the amalgamated office portion of the agreement when construction costs became prohibitive.

However, SD 71 did continue with the land exchange and sale. The sale of the existing board office was started in 2016 and completed in 2021. SD 71 received funds from the CVRD for the sale of both pieces of land (Harmston Park land, as well as the existing board office at 607 Cumberland Rd.) and secured a 99-year pre-paid lease for continued use of the existing building. The funds received by SD 71 could be used for the purpose of upgrades of the existing board office or to develop a different board office. In addition, recognizing that a permanent administrative solution would be necessary, the Board has set aside funds annually for new office space.

It's important to note that the 2488 Idiens Way property is a surplus property within another public sector organization. Thus, the transfer is repurposing a property between two public sector organizations. Meaning the sale is priced based on a third-party, September 2021 property assessment – rather than prices from the open real estate market.

SD 71 has completed due diligence by engaging a real estate professional and three independent firms to evaluate this purchase. This included a functional space analysis review, an architecture firm, and an environmental assessment – all of which provided favorable recommendations to support this purchase.

The sale will close in April 2022. It's expected that 2488 Idiens Way will need an addition and minor renovation and should be ready for occupation by SD 71 in August 2023. The 607 Cumberland Road property will continue to be utilized for educational purposes by the district in the foreseeable future.

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Media Contact

Craig Sorochan

Manager of Communications

Comox Valley Schools (School District 71)

Office: (250) 334-5500