

update

Christine Meikle Replacement School

In January, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) received approval from the Province of Alberta to build a replacement for Christine Meikle School. This document provides background information about the construction of the replacement school on the CBE school site in Varsity Acres.

Christine Meikle School

Christine Meikle School provides educational programming for secondary school-age students who have moderate to severe developmental disabilities/delays with complex learning, medical and emotional needs.

The school is extremely important to the students and families it serves and is a vital component in the CBE's commitment to providing inclusive and personalized learning. The program draws junior/senior high school students who are 12 to 19 years of age from across Calgary. Programming components include: functional academics, work experience, activities of daily living, adaptive physical education, fine arts, assistive technology, augmentative communication and sensory motor development.

Current Facility

The existing Christine Meikle School is located at 64 12 St. N.E. in a 55-year-old facility that is not suitable for its current programming purpose. The facility was not originally designed to accommodate this type of programming, nor the highly specialized equipment required for our students with complex special education needs. For example, the hallways and rooms are not large enough for the equipment and wheelchairs used by the students. In addition to the limitation of the physical space for functional programming, the population requiring this highly specialized programming will benefit from updated facilities.

Replacement School

The replacement school will be built on an approved vacant CBE school space in Varsity Acres. The site is west of 50 Street and north of Varna Crescent N.W. on a CBE-owned school site that is zoned for educational purposes.

The new site is a favourable location for the school because of its proximity to the Alberta Children's Hospital. The community of support for these students and their families is centred around the Alberta Children's Hospital, Vecova, University of Calgary, Ronald McDonald House, the Child Development Centre, and Sinneave Family Foundation's Ability Hub, which provides assistance to students with Autism Spectrum

Disorders, their families and CBE staff. The location surrounding the new site offers a variety of opportunity for work experience, leisure and daily living skills development. The new school will be designed to accommodate up to 160 students.

Community Interaction

Christine Meikle School has had very good relationship with its current community (Bridgeland/Riverside) and looks forward to the same in Varsity. The CBE is committed to working with the Varsity Community Association and with residents as Christine Meikle School is introduced into their community.

The CBE acknowledges community concerns about communication. The CBE overestimated community awareness and understanding of the long-time designation of this site as a school site, and of processes that have taken place since the CBE obtained provincial funding in January.

The CBE is focusing on improving communication moving forward. We will listen and understand residents' concerns and provide opportunities for residents to communicate with us. The CBE is in communication with the Varsity Community Association and will partner extensively with the association support full and open communication.

Timeline

To understand how this project has evolved, here is a summary of the process to date:

- In 1971, the site in Varsity was designated as a school site.
- In November 2007, the CBE declared the site surplus to its needs. However, the City of Calgary never took title or changed its school designation.
- In 2010, Christine Meikle School became a ranked priority in the CBE School Capitol Plan.
- On September 20, 2012, the CBE requested that site be returned as the need for schools rapidly expanded in the city.
- March 13, 2013, the Ministers of Education and Infrastructure and the City of Calgary were told that CBE intended to use the site for Christine Meikle School, if the school was approved by the Province from the CBE Three-Year School Capital Plan.
- January 21, 2014, Alberta Infrastructure announced funding for a replacement school for the Christine Meikle facility.
- In February 2014, the Christine Meikle project, including site plans were contained in documents presented to at a Board of Trustees meeting as part of an accommodation planning briefing.
- In March 2014, this information was also included in the CBE's Capital Plan which was publicly presented to the Board of Trustees.
- Ongoing, the information has also been reported in monthly construction updates on the CBE's public website.

Were Other Sites Investigated by the CBE?

Vecova

Questions have been asked about whether the school could be located on Vecova's site. Vecova currently provides contract services to other students but not to Christine Meikle School students.

The CBE did investigate the Vecova site on 32 Avenue N.W. However, this site was not a feasible solution for Christine Meikle School because it is too small.

University of Calgary West Campus

Another possible location that some have suggested is the University of Calgary's west campus area. In fact, the CBE has been in active conversation with the U of C and the Province about the university's West Campus plans. The land is owned by the Province and leased to the university.

However, there are currently no approved development plans for these lands. As a result, the availability of a school site on these lands is seven to 10 years away. The need for a new Christine Meikle School is immediate and Provincial funds are available now.

Other Questions and Answers

Q. What is the urgency in this project?

A. The need for a replacement school for Christine Meikle was identified and documented in the CBE Capital Plan in 2010. It took four years to get provincial approval which was announced in January this year. The existing Christine Meikle School is in a 55-year-old facility that is not suitable for its current purpose. The facility was not originally designed to accommodate the school program, nor the equipment required to serve its students with special education needs. The hallways and rooms are not large enough for the equipment and wheelchairs used by the students. It will take until 2016 to get the school built, six years after the need to relocate was identified.

Q. Why is it advantageous for it to be close to the hospital?

A. Christine Meikle School students are medically stable adolescents who have the ongoing need for medical and follow-up appointments within that surrounding community. The community of support for these students and their families is centred around the Alberta Children's Hospital, Vecova, University of Calgary, Ronald McDonald House, the Child Development Centre, and Sinneave Family Foundation's Ability Hub, which provides assistance to students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, their families and CBE staff. The location surrounding the new site offers a variety of opportunity for work experience, leisure and daily living skills development.

Q. When will the community communication be done?

A. Information about the Christine Meikle School is already up on the CBE web site (www.cbe.ab.ca) on the “Schools and Areas” page. In addition:

- Jeannie Everett , Area 1 Director, will work with CBE Communications Services to ensure that community communications are discussed and coordinated with the Varsity Community Association to ensure ongoing and open lines of communication
- The CBE will ensure that that residents have the information they require and that they will be able to ask questions and provide input
- The CBE will host an open house for community residents in June or early summer
- CBE staff are available to make presentations to residents and the Community Association
- The CBE will update the website regularly

Q. Why didn't you consult with the community earlier?

A. We learn from every project we do. In this case we misjudged the understanding of the community that this space was designated CBE property and that our intention was indeed to build a school on the site. The CBE regrets any inconvenience or confusion this has caused in the community and is committed to listening and providing ongoing information as the project proceeds.