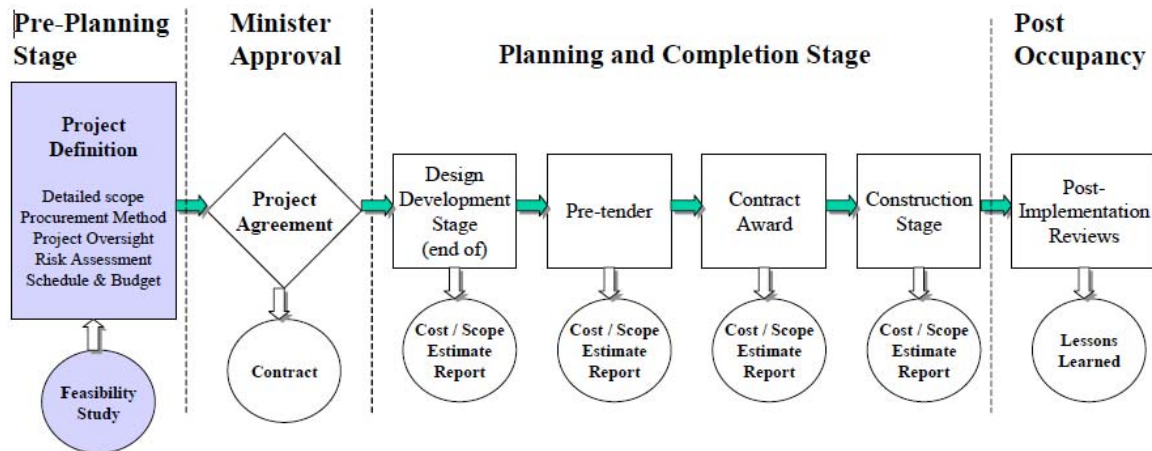


Ministry of Education Capital Project Process



Where does NLC planning fit in?

According to John Cavelti at the Ministry of Education, the capital planning process hasn't yet been matched up with the planning process for NLCs, or at least not formalized in any diagrams. That said, a defined vision for the NLC would not be expected or required until a project agreement has been drawn up, as this agreement sets out the size of the school renovation or school reconstruction that the Ministry has approved, which in turn determines exactly how much additional space the Ministry will allocate to accommodate the NLC.

Ordinarily, community consultations leading to detailed plans and MOUs for the NLC would not occur until the final stage of design development.

Where are we right now?

SD5 has submitted a Project Identification Report (PIR) to the Ministry, which is preliminary to the Project Definition stage shown in the above diagram. SD5 is awaiting notification of initial project support and Ministry direction to proceed. Capital construction project funding must be approved before the Ministry will consider proposals for a Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

When will SD5 get the green light to proceed?

Short answer: No one knows. According to John Cavelti, there is no "queue" per se, so it is impossible to say when Mt Baker will be approved. Long answer: The Ministry makes requests to the Treasury Board for money. They are still reviewing last year's capital plans. They don't yet know how much they will have for this year or to which priority areas it will need to be directed. The priorities for Ministry of Education capital expenditures are directed by the government, and generally fall into four categories: seismic mitigation; building envelope remediation (a problem on the rainy coast where moisture leakages and mold are causing building decay);

accommodation of rapidly increasing student populations in high-growth areas; and replacement of old schools. The Ministry has funded over 20 major capital projects (e.g., school replacements) per year since 2004.

Common sense following recent events in Japan suggests that seismic mitigation will be a high priority this year and will be in the government's interest to pursue with added urgency. Of the nearly 750 schools in 39 districts that were identified in 2004 as requiring seismic upgrades, only 99 have been completed to date, 25 are under construction, and 10 are proceeding to construction (as of April 14, 2011)¹.

What does the Ministry need in order for this project to proceed?

When the Ministry of Education announces its initial support for the Mt Baker SS replacement project and feasibility studies have been reviewed, a Project Agreement can be drawn up. The Ministry will then require SD5 to present a case for the inclusion of specific partner programs, organizations or services that they will consider for approval as part of the NLC.

What types of organizations or services can be partners in an NLC?

According to the BC Ministry of Education's website, Neighbourhood Learning Centres are *"welcoming places where people of all ages can access learning and community services"*.

Neighbourhood Learning Centres typically include a mix of student-support services and family-oriented or community-oriented programs. The specifics of their design—and the decisions made about which partner programs and services to include—reflect the communities' unique needs and priorities. For example, one NLC in Richmond chose to offer services that all related to the theme of literacy, particularly cultural literacy for new immigrants, mostly from Asia.

NLC projects typically begin by identifying their communities' priorities and establishing some criteria for decision-making around acceptable uses and highest-priority partnerships.

Are P3s (public-private partnerships) a possibility?

As taxpayer-financed capital projects, Neighbourhood Learning Centres have an overarching responsibility to be contributing to the public good. However, there are circumstances in which a P3 might be considered. One lower Mainland school has a theatre attached to it the construction of which was financed entirely by private sector investment—it is now the "Bell Theatre". That said, corporate advertising in schools is a sensitive issue for many people who may have concerns about the possible erosion of public education as it comes to rely more and more on private investment.

Moreover, according to John Cavelti, an application to the Ministry that includes a plan to lease public space—the construction of which was paid for by the Ministry—to for-profit commercial ventures is not likely to be approved.

¹ Source: BC Ministry of Education Seismic Mitigation Progress Report
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/seismic/progress_report.html