



New university reaches lease deal

School district getting \$4.5 million for Blanshard site as private institution prepares to open in fall

Jeff Rud

Times Colonist

Wednesday, December 08, 2004

Fledgling University Canada West won't take on its first students until September but it will make its initial lease payment -- \$1.9 million -- to the Greater Victoria school district next month.

The new private university has formalized a 99-year agreement with the school district to lease the former Blanshard elementary school for just over \$4.5 million in total.

That will consist of an up-front payment of \$1.9 million next month followed by subsequent annual payments over the first 10 years of the deal totalling \$2,606,164.

"We're confident that we have struck the best possible deal for the school district," board chairman Michael McEvoy said in an interview Tuesday.

The district will not be able to use the money for operating expenses, but the cash will indirectly help the board budget on a year-to-year basis.

"Because the lease is in excess of five years, under provincial regulations the money must be used for capital expenses," McEvoy said.

Those may include some improvements in earthquake-proofing, he said, but they will also likely include efficiency upgrades to things such as heat, electrical and water systems in some schools, which will reduce the district's annual operating costs.

The deal will leave University Canada West and its parent company LearningWise Inc. responsible for all maintenance on the site. "There's no additional cost to the district," McEvoy said. "We're very pleased about this deal. We think it's a very good fit for the district. It's an educational facility going there. It brings substantial financial benefits to the district."

University Canada West can now begin renovating the Blanshard school building to suit its needs. First on the list is the removal of cloakroom areas from classrooms so that they can comfortably seat 50 students.

"The classrooms are the first priority," said UCW vice-president Jim Griffith. "Obviously we'd like to physically alter the outside, but we can't paint or do any of that really until spring."

The university plans to erect a sign to mark the property, change the colour of the building and perhaps redo the front entrance.

UCW had hoped to begin offering its first classes next month to a small group of students. But tight timelines and a lack of committed students caused the new university to put off its start until fall.

"Realistically, September was always the real start for us," Griffith said.

"I think we're just convinced that it's not the right time of the year to start (in January.)"

"And obviously our lease kicked in a little later than we eventually hoped it would get through the system. I don't think we're ready, either, with the number of students required or the number of contractors lined up to get the work done for January."

UCW will begin this fall with a master's program in business administration as well as a bachelor of commerce in management technology. Griffith said the new school is applying to the province for permission to grant several other degrees, including arts and applied science, with several majors planned for each category.

"We're really hoping that over the next three to five years we'll be able to offer upwards of 16 different degrees," Griffith said.

UCW will occupy half of the seven-acre Blanshard site. The north half will be developed into multi-family housing, for which it is zoned. Real estate consultant Sandy Beaman is working with LearningWise on that project and said it is in the "very early stage" of development.

Beaman and Griffith said LearningWise is committed to consulting with neighbourhood groups about their views on the changes to the Blanshard property.

"Part of our agreement is that we would try, in as much as possible, to maintain some part of that facility in greenspace which could be used by the neighbourhood," Griffith said.

jrud@island.net

© Times Colonist (Victoria) 2004

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2004 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#) All rights reserved.
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

