

West Accommodation Review Committee Meeting

Public Meeting

Westdale Secondary School

March 1, 2011

Minutes

ATTENDANCE:

Committee Members

Chair –Superintendent Sharon Stephanian

Voting Members – Christopher Austin, Deborah Beedie, Phyllis Chasty, Lawrie Cook, Deborah Knoll, Lori King, Heather MacDonald, Judy Shen, Sharon Ricci, Boris Williams

Non-Voting Members –Paul Barwinski, Judith Bishop, Jessica Brennan, Krys Croxall, Em Del Sordo, Michelle DesRochers, Rick Hart, Alex Johnstone, Judy Langsner, John Laverty, Brian Lenart, Maria Rikic-McCarthy, Laurie Swackhammer, Dan Thomson , Anne Waldie

Regrets

Voting Members - Rosemary Bellefeuille, Allyssa Horning, Bea Howell

Non-Voting Members – Gudrun Anderson, Lloyd Ferguson, Brian Mchattie, Russ Powers

Resource Staff

Daniel Del Bianco, Don Hall, Jim Wibberley, Superintendent Peter Joshua, Ellen Warling, Steve Stirling, Kevin Morton

Recording Secretary

Tracy McKillop

- 1. Welcome and Introductions*** – Superintendent Sharon Stephanian called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. Superintendent Stephanian commenced the meeting by introducing the members of the committee. She shared that the ARC Committee is made up of parents, community representatives, Principals, school staff, student representatives, Trustees, Ward Councillors, and Superintendents.
- 2. Chair's Opening Remarks*** – Superintendent Stephanian informed the public that the Board of Trustees approved the formation of three secondary accommodation review committees – South,

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North and West. All but three schools of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board were included in these reviews. The schools that were not included are Waterdown, Westmount and Saltfleet. These schools were not included because their enrolments are larger than their capacity.

The Chair indicated that there are a number of reasons why the Board approved these accommodation reviews but essentially it is because the Board faces challenges on three major fronts:

- The world is changing and changing quickly. Our students are changing as well. They learn differently and they engage differently. We must ensure that our schools, now and in the future deliver the relevant and engaging programs our students need and deserve.
- Like almost all Boards in this province we are faced with declining enrolment. Declining enrolment is a demographic reality across Ontario. This has resulted in a number of our schools having a great deal of excess space or capacity. This excess space is costly to the Board.
- Many of our secondary schools are at the point where they will require costly upgrading and renewal because of their age. In addition we must adapt the physical space to deliver new and innovative programs.

The Chair stated that an overview of some of the information that the committee had received so far would be shared, however, he stated that the real reason for the meeting was for the ARC Committee members to hear the public's thoughts, questions and concerns.

3. Presentations

Overview of the Accommodation Review Process – Mr. Del Bianco began the evening presentation explaining why there was a public meeting. The reason for the public meeting is:

- To provide an overview of the ARC Process
- To present the recommendation prepared by the Board Staff
- Address any questions related to the ARC process and School Information Profiles (SIP)
- Provide input to the ARC members to assist them in developing their own options

Mr. Del Bianco provided a brief overview of the ARC process. This was an abbreviated version of what had been presented to the ARC Committee. The major purpose of the ARC is to prepare a report for the Board of Trustees with the ARC Committee's recommendation. The Board of Trustees will not make any decisions until they have considered the recommendations from both the ARC Committee as well as the Board's recommendation. Mr. Del Bianco showed a slide of the purpose of the future public meetings and an outline of what will be discussed at those public meetings.

For a look at the full presentation of the Accommodation Review Process please see the ARC web site at: <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Overview-of-the-Process-West1.pdf>

To see the slide presentation shown at the Public Meeting held on March 1, 2011 please see the Arc web site at: http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/WestARC_Public_Meeting1_Final_March1_2011.pdf

School information Profiles (SIP) -Mr. Del Bianco showed an example of the School Information Profiles (SIP) and explained that it contains 21 sections and 182 items for the ARC Committee to review. The entire SIP is located on the ARC web site at: <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/West-SIP1.pdf>

Accessing ARC Information - All of the meetings are open to the public and all of the information that is presented to the ARC Committee is listed on the web site at www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc

Why an Accommodation Review – Associate Director Bain informed the audience that the Ministry policy requires Senior Administration to provide their recommendation to the ARC and the public during the ARC process. There is no stipulation as to when the recommendation is to be presented however HWDSB’s Senior Administration team felt that they would share it early in the process. He shared that this is a point in time recommendation. Associate Director Bain stated that HWDSB currently has 2,600 extra seats within the secondary schools. The Board is funded on a per student basis and not by the facility and they receive the same amount of funding regardless of the number of buildings that the Board operates. At the moment there is approximately \$160 million in outstanding renewal needs in the secondary schools. Associate Director Bain then went on to say that change is required that the status quo is no longer an option. If HWDSB has the right number of buildings then they believe that they can deliver exceptional education for the students in well resourced schools. HWDSB will be able to deliver programming in the 21st century – Please see the web site for more information at: <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Education-for-the-21st-Century-West1.pdf>

HWDSB will also have access to engaging programs and leaning environments – Please see the web site for more information at: <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/arc/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/SecondaryProgramStrategy.pdf>

Associate Director Bain stated that our students learn differently today and are experiencing a different world. This process will provide more opportunities for the students. It will allow them to have access to more pathways and more chances for success beyond graduation.

If we can combine some of the schools and increase enrolment then larger Secondary School environments can mean the following for students:

Program Benefits

- Provide greater options for students

- Broader course selection
- Flexible student timetables
- More opportunities for all pathways

Financial Benefits

- Vast majority of grants are provided on a per pupil basis – therefore spreading the funding over fewer schools allows for greater benefits
- Renewal – removing those schools with high renewal needs would allow the Board to reallocate those funds to the remaining schools.

Associate Director Bain showed a chart which outlined the current situation, the on-the-ground capacity, enrolment utilization for 2009/10, 2015/16, 2020/21, the current FCI and the 10 year FCI. He also spoke of the schools located in the West ARC and their associated boundaries.

Associate Director Bain explained the west ARC Cluster Proposed Recommendation

- Close Parkside in June 2013
- Relocate the students to the existing facilities effective September 2013.

Associate Director Bain then displayed a chart showing the enrolment percentage changes that would result from the above listed closings. The money from the sale of Parkside will be reinvested into the remaining schools. Associate Director Bain went on to explain that this is a concept plan only. The boundaries still need to be looked at and re-aligned and the transportation changes are yet to be decided. Superintendent Joshua is putting a Program Strategy in place that will support the students. Associate Director Bain stated that the ARC is here to listen to the questions and comments of the community.

The floor was then opened to the public to begin with their questions and comments.

Diana Kenel, a mother of three felt that closing Parkside was not the best financial decision. Diana is a local business owner. Ms Kenel indicated that Parkside has a small, economical footprint at only 4 acres for the Board to maintain while it benefits directly from using the adjacent newly renovated and well maintained outdoor resources of the 26.5 acre driving park at no cost to the Board. She stated that the driving park that the Parkside buses currently use already provides a huge amount of additional space to

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line up extra buses as well as additional parking if the two Dundas schools were combined at Parkside. This would result in no additional cost to the Board. Ms. Kenel shared that according to the Dundas Star the four acre Parkside site is valued at \$6.8 million and if the same valuation ratio with Highland (18 acres) were to be used its value would be more than \$31 million dollars. She stated that the \$31 million dollars would go a long way in renovating the remaining ARC West schools of Parkside, Westdale and Ancaster. If that savings were added to the previously mentioned savings that makes for a very strong financial argument for keeping Parkside open and selling Highland. Ms. Kenel asked “will the Board/Committee commit tonight to fully determining and publishing the value of selling the Highland site and calculating the additional cost savings to the Board for the use of the driving park. This alternative will achieve the best financial outcome for the Secondary West ARC since all parties can agree that \$31 million dollars will go a lot further than the alternative of just \$6.8 million towards renovations to ensure the future success of Parkside, Westdale and Ancaster.” Mr. Don Hall, the Senior Facilities Manager, stated appraisals would be necessary to determine the property value and that he was not familiar with the values that Ms. Kenel was quoting.

Kodi Organ, shared that her sister would be coming to Parkside school, and she is currently a student. Kodi inquired if the West ARC had considered the EQAO standards and if the Board had studied the statistics from the school. Associate Director Bain referenced the recommendation that was presented earlier and shared that the recommendation was not based on EQAO scores, or graduation rate it is based on what had been shown on the screen. He did state that the information is on the School Information Profiles (SIP) and thanked Kodi for raising the question.

Howard Barker, a parent of students who will be coming to Parkside, did not agree with the closing of any schools. He stated that in the future the enrolment could change and you could be looking at 125% capacity. Mr. Barker was concerned that in the future you will have portables and extra transportation costs and is this in alignment with what the Board says it wants for the future students – a new Program Strategy and better facilities for the future? Mr. Del Bianco stated that there has been a decline in the enrolment in the elementary schools. He stated that when you are looking at an option you look at the short term, mid term and long term and you have to balance the short term benefits with the long term benefits. In the short term the enrolment may go up or down and you may have to use portables during the fluctuations, however the long term trend is a downward trend.

Richard Bartley who has two children at Parkside would like to see the Board’s financial plans on how it will move ahead with the 21st Century Program before making any decisions on closing the schools.

Margot Carnahan is a Parkside parent and understands the need for some amalgamation and how the declining enrolment is affecting the programming at Parkside. She believes that this is only a short term solution however and would like to see the ARC consider a new school or upgrade one of the existing schools in order that it meets the 21st Century Programming. Associate Director Bain shared that the goal is to take the operational savings and the money from the sale of the properties and reinvest it back into the existing facilities and the programming. The Board is hesitant to recommend a new school until the Ministry states their intent on capital funding. He feels that more clarity on this matter is required.

Ms. Carnahan inquired when that might happen. Associate Director Bain stated that the first indication could be the budget in March although he was not sure about that however he did feel that this could affect the Board's recommendation. Ms. Carnahan asked if it was possible that the ARC may not hear about this funding during this year. Associate Director Bain stated "that is correct." Ms. Carnahan wanted to know that if it took 10 years to sell the property would the schools have to wait 10 years to have money reinvested into the remaining schools. Associate Director Bain indicated that the Board receives 8 million per year which would permit the sharing of those funds immediately.

Scott Kilby, a Parkside teacher, wanted to know if students would be denied the opportunity to choose which school they would like to attend because at the moment they are permitted to choose their school. Associate Director Bain stated that it could be a balancing act. There will be defined areas however the Board will make accommodations if a student requires a certain program. When the Program Strategy rolls out students may choose to go to a school based on the programming.

Kathy Cope shared that her daughter will graduate when Parkside is designated to close. Her concern was if the school were to close as well as the park and the land developed that would change the area. She asked that if you could choose any school why you would pick Parkside. She stated that you can move the student to the various schools – not just Highland but Ancaster as well. Associate Director Bain stated that Highland has a larger site and provides opportunity for expansion if necessary. Parkside also has a lower capacity than Highland.

Kodi Organ wanted to know what would happen to her sister Cleo. Her sister has special needs and she is concerned how she would manage in a large classroom setting. She asked if her sister would get lost in the system and would she have to go to Ancaster? Superintendent Stephanian stated that the Board is very committed to supporting all of the students. Class sizes will continue to remain what they have always been. Superintendent Corcoran shared that the Board has looked at the Program Strategy for students who have a diverse set of needs. The Program Strategy supports students who have more social and emotional needs as well as learning needs. She stated that there is no need to worry about class size as the needs are evaluated the class size can be adjusted. The Program Strategy is on the web site so please feel free to look at it. Associate Director Bain informed Kodi that at this point in time he "wished that he could tell Kodi how Cleo would get to school " however until the recommendation is heard from the Board of Trustees that will not be addressed. He did state that the Board "will have excellent programs in well maintained schools." He thanked Kodi for her questions.

Lela Simone asked if during the ARC process is there discussion with any other area school boards. Perhaps they could share on venue. She went on to ask "would the Ministry fund HWDSB in using space in a Halton school or a Catholic or Christian school?" Associate Director Bain stated that the ARC can only discuss the schools within the Terms of Reference and at this moment in time the Ministry has not contemplated that HWDSB share facilities with other school boards.

Kathryn Kohler was concerned about the students in Westdale. She asked "is it anticipated that there would be new programs or is the Board just moving the programs to other schools?" Mr. Del Bianco

shared that programs change and the enrolments will change. Superintendent Joshua stated that the Program Strategy the Board will be implementing will support the students to actualize their pathways and distribution of the programming is important. It is important that every student has an opportunity to actualize their goals.

Howard Barker asked why Parkside was chosen for closure and not Highland. Would it be possible to put a 3rd floor on Parkside? He stated that since the amalgamation there have been 42 closures. He wanted to know how many closures are directly associated with the amalgamation. Mr. Barker stated that people are thinking “why enrol your children when you are closing the school?” He wanted to know how many parents has the Board talked to about this and what percentage of recommended closures actually closed. Superintendent Stephanian stated that the purpose of the public meeting is to provide input to the ARC. This is the first of four opportunities and the public can e-mail to ARC info and this goes directly to the ARC. Associate Director Bain stated that as of September 2011 Parkside is remaining open and there has been no decision to close Parkside and that is why the students should enrol at the school. He shared that the ARC is looking for your input and recommendations. Nothing is a done deal and everyone is benefiting from hearing from the community. Associate Director Bain indicated that the timing is never right. Boards that have held onto their recommendations are criticized for not being open and transparent. HWDSB is being open and thought that it would be better to do it at the beginning of the process.

Shelley Stirling-Boyes wanted clarification of the recommendation and wanted to know if Parkside closed would the renovation be completed by Sept 2013 when the students move over. She also wanted to know why in 2013 you would have the schools over capacity instead of waiting until the schools reach 100%. She stated that you are transitioning students to a school that is overcapacity. Associate Director Bain shared that the students would be moved to the three schools not just Highland and it is the Board’s intention to have the renovations completed. He stated that they do not want to wait longer because HWDB needs to get out from under the operations side and one of the mandates is to recommend an implementation schedule. The ARC can make a different recommendation and the goal is to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Allison Grant who is a teacher at Parkside is concerned with the recommendations that have been made. She feels that the school is going to suffer in September with enrolment. She wanted to know if there were any steps taken to avoid this from happening or have there been any statistics done on how many they will lose to the Catholic Board. Mr. Del Bianco stated that the Board could have chosen to present their recommendation at anytime during the year however they chose to present it early on in the process. Associate Director Bain shared that the night prior to the recommendation being presented a letter was sent out to the principal of Parkside, one to the staff and one for the parents. He has also spoken to the media and sent a letter home to the elementary schools as well. He feels that the Board has shared the information yet people still chose to jump to conclusions.

Tania Gibson stated that Waterdown is over capacity so has the board ever considered rezoning the Waterdown area. She also asked if there would be portables at the Highland site. Mr. Del Bianco

shared that the ARC Committee has already requested that information. He stated that the committee has to work within the Terms of Reference and rezoning is not going to change due to the growth in Waterdown. He went on to say that although the ARC can't make the recommendation to change Waterdown they can ask for a study of the boundary lines. The Board hopes to be able to accommodate all of the students in the existing three schools and it could mean portables in the short term at Highland.

Kathleen Lennon wanted to share that she did not want to see Parkside close because her son will have to move in grade 12. She wanted to know what would happen if they move and their programs that they want are no longer available. She also stated that Spencer Valley parents are already talking about not sending their kids to Parkside. Superintendent Joshua indicated that the needs of the students will be taken into consideration and the new Program Strategy is intended to insure that the needs of the students are being met. This also takes into account their emotional needs.

Terri Stewart-Bonnie benefited from small schools and feels that there is more opportunity in a small school. She stated that the students have set up a Facebook page to save Parkside. She wanted to know what would happen to the downtown businesses and what the Board will do with the cafeteria at Highland.

Richard Bartley wanted to know if the Board or the ARC had looked at new funding models, or other funding sources. He stated that in the United Kingdom they had big changes and they set up public partnerships which freed up money, and they had community services in the school. He asked about seeking out grants for the smaller schools and grants for older schools or creating a high honours programs. Mr. Bartley mentioned multiple site schooling or having different programs on different sites.

Kodi Organ gave Miss Collins a big "thank you!" Kodi asked why Parkside at this time and will we need to change our directions because the curriculum changes? Associate Director Bain stated that it is difficult to create perfect timing. The Board values openness and transparency and that is why they have shared the recommendation early on in the process. Superintendent Joshua stated that the Program Strategy will continue to meet the needs of the students with the proper class sizes, the programs that are being offered and it is geared to the learner.

Naomi Shepherd who has a student at Highland has already been through this process and finds it very disheartening. She says that it starts to pit one school against another. She shared that being a parent at Highland does not mean she does not feel for the parents of Parkside. She stated that this often creates a holding pattern in the school. Upgrades are not made to the facility or the programming and funding gets held back because of the slated closure. She asked "how are we going to ensure that we do not go into holding patterns and the students are not being punished?" Mr. Don Hall stated that the Board has far more work to do than the money that is available to do it. The Board always has to look at the high and urgent needs of the schools as they come up and HWDSB will continue to invest in the schools. He stated that for every \$10.00 in need \$1.50 is spent. He also shared that if Ms. Sheppard was talking about new technologies that are transportable then yes we focus on the needs of the schools.

Margaret Awrey wanted to know how you stop the bleeding. Human nature is that Parkside will start to decline and families will choose not to send their children to Parkside. Are there things that you can put in place to stop the students from going to Highland instead of Parkside? Mr. Del Bianco shared that this is important for the ARC Committee to hear and they can discuss this and debate options.

Howard Barker thought that perhaps it would be advantageous for the Principals to send home a letter to the parents to stem the desertion. Associate Director Bain stated that Mr. Barwinski could send home a letter however it would not be any different then the one that he himself had already distributed however the input would be taken away for further discussion.

Naomi Shepherd feels that there is a lack of representation. She feels that the information is not being passed on to the elementary cluster schools and she felt like most of the information was simply word of mouth. She also asked why there was no representation from the elementary cluster schools. Associate Director Bain stated that everything is on the web site. Principals have been asked to put notices in the newsletters and information has been sent to the elementary schools. The parents from the elementary schools were taken into consideration when the committee was determining the terms of reference. The Ministry Policy does not have elementary representatives on the Secondary ARC and this would create some very large ARC committees.

A student from Parkside requested that we review the on-the-ground capacity formula again because he feels that 777 is correct.

Eric Lootsma wanted to know if it was ever considered to present alternatives when making the recommendation. He feels that if we are moving to a cluster program would it not have been better to say "a" school would be closing instead of saying "the" school is closing. Mr. Del Bianco stated that the Ministry says to be as clear as humanly possible. It is in the policy. He says that it creates suspicion if you are not clear. The ARC Committee will be back on May 10th 2011 and the options of the committee will be presented and they can present a different option.

Tania Gibson wanted to know if the Board had been in touch with the City because if Parkside closes you have increased enrolment which results in more bussing. You will have a two lane road and three schools within a close proximity. Mr. Don Hall shared that it has not been followed up on yet. Once a decision has been made then the Board will contact the correct areas and make the correct applications.

Diana Kenel stated that Dundas is a special town that considers Parkside School and the park as one. It saves the Board a lot of money. She feels that the park will be much less vibrant without Parkside and children use the facilities at lunch and after school. It will impact the downtown core as well.

Superintendent Stephanian gave her thanks to everyone for coming out and participating in the evening of questions and comments. She requested that the ARC Committee members remain after the meeting to finalize the school tours.