

YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

WELLS STREET PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

BACKGROUND:

In September, 2008, staff recommended to trustees that an accommodation review take place for Wells Street Public School. This recommendation was based on the need for major capital improvements to the building as well as safety concerns and declining enrolment.

The information gathering part of the accommodation review process is now complete. Trustees have received reports from both the Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) and Board staff, as well as input from the community which occurred at public meetings and at delegations to the Board.

The next stage of the process requires a decision by trustees on the future of the school.

RATIONALE:

Over the past year, the required public consultation and reports have been submitted to trustees in compliance with the Board's Policy and Procedure #463.0 which sets out the policy framework, application, legislative context and responsibilities for the accommodation review process. The process and timeframe used were also in compliance with the Ministry of Education's Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines. As a result of this extensive process, trustees have before them detailed information and recommendations on the school from a variety of sources, including the ARC, Board staff and the community at large, to assist in making a decision on the future of the school.

The Board also consulted with the Town of Aurora to confirm population and growth scenarios. As well, two meetings were held with Town representatives to discuss the future of the school; these meetings occurred on March 9 and September 10, 2009.

Communications to the community were made in the form of seven letters to parents of students, five Canada Post mail-outs to every household in the school boundary, six paid advertisements in two community newspapers, signage at Wells Street Public School, and ongoing postings on the Board's website.

A timeline of events is attached as Appendix I. It should also be noted that all material referenced in this Report can be found on the Board's website.

ARC Recommendations

The ARC School Valuation Report recommendations were submitted to the Director of Education within the timeframe required in the Board's policy and were presented to trustees at the April 30, 2009 Board meeting.

The ARC's work was an essential part of the review process and has brought forward to trustees a broad range of information and issues for dialogue and consideration as part of their final decision. The ARC recommended that trustees rebuild the school and that consideration should be given to a number of strategies to increase enrolment at the school. The ARC's recommendations were as follows:

- That the Board be encouraged to rebuild Wells Street Public School to serve current and future students in the community.
- That the Board consider the accommodation options identified by the ARC to increase enrolment as well as community uses at the school.
- That the rebuilt school be a JK-8 school.
- That the Board be encouraged to continue the partnership with the Town of Aurora to ensure school use of the Town park and the portion of Wells Street in front of the school.
- That the Board support any community efforts to seek sources of funding external to the Board to assist in covering the cost of the rebuilding of the school.

It should be noted that the ARC made the decision not to explore alternative accommodation plans for Wells Street Public School students in the event that the school was not rebuilt.

Community Input

The community at large provided input at a series of five public meetings; four of these meetings were held as part of the ARC process while the fifth was hosted by the trustees on June 15, 2009. As well, trustees heard 32 delegations at the April 30, July 6 and September 14, 2009 Board meetings. Minutes for each of these meetings were recorded and are available on the Board's website.

Almost all of the comments made by the community in delegations and at public meetings were in favour of rebuilding the school for a wide variety of reasons including:

- Value of a local school to serve the community
- Value of a local school to serve students
- Small school environment
- Future increases in enrolment

The community also posed many questions for staff and trustees including:

- Validity of the enrolment projections
- Validity of the costs to replace the school
- Opportunities for alternative funding sources
- Opportunities for alternative programming options

Staff Reports to Trustees

Staff submitted four reports to trustees: the September 25, 2008 Preliminary Report, the April 30 Staff Report, the July 6 Follow-up Report, and the August 25 Information Report.

The Ministry's guidelines and the Board's policy and procedure require staff to present a staff recommendation on the future of the school to the Board not less than 30 days after the ARC School Valuation Report is delivered to the Director of Education, and include in the Staff Report a review of the ARC recommendations.

The April 30, 2009 Staff Report recommended to trustees that the school not re-open for the following reasons:

- Wells Street Public School has experienced and will continue to experience enrolment decline.
- Enrolment decline is also evident in the Aurora West Planning Area where Wells Street Public School is located.
- There are viable alternatives at existing schools in the Aurora West Planning Area to accommodate Wells Street Public School students.
- Allocating \$1.3 million per year over a 10-year period from the Board's annual renewal allocation of \$14 million for the replacement of Wells Street Public School would have negative implications for the remainder of the York Region District School Board schools.
- Providing \$10 million from the Proceeds of Disposition Reserve for the replacement of Wells Street Public School would seriously compromise the Board's ability to undertake a wide range of renewal projects.

Board Procedure #463.0, Student Accommodation Review, requires that staff ensure that a Follow-up Board Report is prepared for the next regularly scheduled Board meeting following the trustee public meeting. The Follow-up Report is intended to provide the staff response to presentations made to trustees. All materials presented to trustees by the public are to be included as part of the Follow-up Report. This Report was provided to trustees at their July 6, 2009 meeting. The main areas addressed in this Follow-Up Report included: accuracy of enrolment projections, future of the building, building structure and costs, alternative funding, impact of full day kindergarten/small schools, and involvement/engagement of the community.

Because new questions were raised by delegates and trustees at the July 6 Board meeting, an Information Report by staff was provided to trustees at the August 25 Board meeting which clarified cost estimates, sources of financing, enrolment decline, students from intensification, and the decision-making process.

Conclusion

The Ministry guidelines and the Board's policy for accommodation reviews speak to ensuring that the review process is based on the full involvement of an informed local community as well as a broad range of criteria regarding the quality of the learning experience for students.

Throughout the accommodation review process, it is clear that parents and other community members have been and remain actively engaged in the process, and that they are very supportive of a continued school presence in the Wells Street Public School community. This is evident in their input through participation on the ARC, delegations to trustees and presentations / attendance at the five public meetings.

The York Region District School Board is committed to providing a suitable and equitable range of learning opportunities in York Region public schools. This requires the Board to consider not only the capital and operating costs of our schools, but also the curriculum and programming needs for students when undertaking an accommodation review process. These objectives provide the framework for the approach taken throughout the accommodation review process.

Staff obligations pursuant to the Ministry guidelines require that a recommendation from staff on the future of the school be provided to trustees. On the basis of declining enrolment, available pupil places at nearby schools to accommodate Wells Street Public School students and the cost to rebuild, staff has recommended to trustees that the school not be rebuilt.

If trustees approve the closure of the school, the future of the building needs to be considered. The Wells Street Public School building is important to the community both from a heritage perspective as well as its key location in the downtown core. The Board could retain ownership of the building; however, it would have to provide the repairs necessary to house an alternative Board use.

Alternatively, the Board could invite interest from other public agencies with a view to having them assume ownership. Staff has not explored this option, but would expect that as the school is designated as a property of cultural heritage value and interest under the Ontario Heritage Act, any new owner would need to preserve the heritage elements of the building and appropriately use the building to ensure its preservation.

The Town of Aurora is now undergoing a downtown revitalization strategy intended to revitalize private and public properties and buildings in the downtown core. If the school is closed, there may be an opportunity to work jointly with the Town of Aurora to determine if there are any other public sector uses for this facility.

ESTIMATED COST:

- Approximately \$10 million if the Board decides to replace Wells Street Public School.
- Additional annual transportation costs if the Board decides not to replace Wells Street Public School will be dependent upon the location of the new attendance boundary. Additional bussing costs are estimated at up to \$71,000.
- Heritage implications will depend on the partnership / disposition arrangements determined by the Board.

TIMELINE:

Immediate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff identified the following options for consideration by the Board and is recommending Option B.

Option A:

That the Board rebuild Wells Street Public School, and give consideration to the specific recommendations in the ARC School Valuation Report.

– OR –

Option B:

1. That the Board not rebuild Wells Street Public School based on declining enrolment, available pupil places at nearby schools, and the cost to rebuild Wells Street Public School.
2. That the school be closed effective September, 2010.
3. That Wells Street Public School students continue to be accommodated at Aurora Grove Public School for the 2009-2010 school year
4. That Board staff undertake a boundary review process for Wells Street Public School based on the closure of the school.
5. That in view of the importance of the Wells Street Public School building as a heritage structure and its key location in the downtown core, that Board staff work with the Town of Aurora to identify other public sector users to assume ownership of the Wells Street Public School building.

COMMUNICATION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:

Coordinating Council of Superintendents
Coordinating Council of Superintendents
Board
Notification to School Community

September 9, 2009
September 16, 2009
September 24, 2009
Within one week of decision

APPENDED DATA:

Appendix I: Timeline of Events

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Respectfully submitted,

September 24, 2009

For further information, please contact Ralph Benson or the Director of Education.

Appendix I: Wells Street PS Accommodation Review – Timeline of Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
June 2007	Parents informed that Wells Street PS students would be relocated to Aurora Grove PS starting September 2007
Summer 2007	Invasive testing of Wells Street PS by RJ Burnside
October 15, 2007	Town of Aurora Heritage Advisory Committee brings forward report to designate Wells Street PS under the Ontario Heritage Act
October 25, 2007	RJ Burnside Structural Assessment Report presented to Trustees at Board meeting
May 29, 2008	Feasibility Study for Wells Street PS presented to Trustees at Board meeting
June 19, 2008	Trustees informed of the intention for an accommodation review process at Board meeting
September 25, 2008	Director of Education recommends accommodation review process at Board meeting
October 22, 2008	ARC Working Meeting #1
November 5, 2008	ARC Working Meeting #2
November 19, 2008	ARC Working Meeting #3
December 3, 2008	ARC Public Meeting #1
December 10, 2008	ARC Working Meeting #4
January 5, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #5
January 14, 2009	ARC Public Meeting #2
January 28, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #6
February 2, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #7
February 11, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #8
February 19, 2009	ARC Public Meeting #3
February 25, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #9
March 4, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #10
March 9, 2009	ARC meets with Town of Aurora representatives
March 9, 2009	ARC Public Meeting #4
March 25, 2009	ARC Working Meeting #11
March 27, 2009	ARC Report delivered to Director of Education
April 30, 2009	ARC Report and Staff Report to Board; seven Public Delegations to Board
June 15, 2009	Trustee Public Meeting
July 6, 2009	Staff Follow Up Report to Board; six Public Delegations to Board
August 25, 2009	Staff Information Report to Board
September 10, 2009	Board staff and trustees meet with Town of Aurora representatives
September 14, 2009	Nineteen Public Delegations to Board Standing Committee
September 24, 2009	Final Report to Board