

Accommodation Review Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Accommodation Review Committee was held on April 25, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at the Waterloo Region Catholic Education Centre.

Committee Members Present: Chuck Williams (Principal – St. Luke CES), Rick Boisvert (Principal – St. Nicholas CES), Maureen Sutherland (Parent – St. Paul's), Fr. Charles Fedy (Pastor – St. Agatha Parish), Brian Page (City of Kitchener), Judy Nairn (Trustee – WCDSB), Roger Lawler (Director of Education), Dave Bennett (Senior Manager of Facilities – WCDSB / Committee Chair), John Shewchuk (Senior Manager, Public Affairs – WCDSB), Joseph Gowing (Trustee – WCDSB), Bill Strauss (Mayor – Woolwich Township)

Recording secretary:

Lindsay Reinhardt (Planner – WCDSB)

Regrets: Mark Whaley (Councillor – City of Waterloo), Roger Farwell (The Walter Fedy Partnership), Louise Ervin (Trustee – WCDSB), Heather Cullen (Superintendent – WCDSB),

Next Meetings: Wednesday, April 25, 2007 (6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.)

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer:

The meeting opened at 6:30 p.m. with the Lord's Prayer.

2. Introduction

Dave Bennett explained that the generic valuation framework will be included as part of a larger policy for accommodations. The framework is one part of an accommodation review. The generic framework that is currently being developed by this committee is a higher level framework and the local ARC will be able to add things to it but not delete anything. At this point we should question whether we are including things that shouldn't be in the generic framework. If something is missed, it can always be added by a local ARC. This meeting will cover scoring, value to the community, and value to the local economy because these items were not discussed at the March 28th meeting. Committee members are encouraged to submit any additional comments to Lindsay Reinhardt or Dave Bennett after this meeting.

ACTION: A separate meeting will be scheduled with Chuck Williams, Rick Boisvert and Heather Cullen to go over certain aspects of the value to student section related to student outcomes, programs, and supports.

3. Explanation and Discussion of Scoring

The Ministry guidelines indicate that value to the student should be weighted the highest of all four categories; this implies a numerical system. This generic framework that has been developed is both qualitative and quantitative, which the committee indicated as the desired approach during the February 28th meeting. A numerical score will allow local ARCs to compare the schools more easily. This does not necessarily mean that the school generating the lowest score will close; it will point them in the right direction as to which schools should be considered to close. The scoring may highlight any deficiencies that the local ARC may want to address through different scenarios.

Under each section (value to student, board, community, and economy), there are several categories. The local ARC has the opportunity to add other categories if desired. They are also able to weight these categories as they see fit. All weightings will be the same for each school in the review. In each of these categories, there is a series of questions; many of which are qualitative. After answering these questions, the local ARC will get a sense of how this category should be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest and best score possible). Once the scores

have been determined they are then weighted again by the section (value to student, board, community, and economy) weighting. This value will be located in the box at the beginning of each section that says "weight". This broader weighting is determined by this committee and should be established from the Board's prospective because it is a Board policy.

Keeping in mind that the value to the student must be weighted the highest other school boards that have already gone through this process have the value to student weighted between 40% and 60%. Assuming that the overall score will be out of 100 for simplicity, we need to determine what the weights would be for each category.

Judy Nairn pointed out that if we did something like 40 (student)/20 (board)/20 (community) /20 (economy) then the value to student could be outweighed by the other three categories. Is this something that we would want to do? Dave Bennett said that some boards have put the value of the student at 50% because then it would be 1/2 of the total score. Roger Lawler asked whether value to student and board should be greater than 60% so that that it doesn't get over powered by the community and economy sections. Chuck Williams pointed out that in some ways value to student and board are the same. Expenditures under the board would benefit the student.

Judy Nairn said that if we do something like 40 (student)/20 (board)/20 (community) /20 (economy) then the community weights the same as the board and it may be favorable in a review to say to the community that we're not only concerned about the dollar figures and cost savings. Roger Lawler asked if value to community and economy should be greater than student and board in a town where that is the only school. Bill Strauss pointed out that the students are part of the community therefore if the students do better then the community does better.

Fr. Charles Fedy thought that community should be higher than economy and suggested 50 (student)/20 (board)/20 (community) /10 (economy). He used the example of St Agatha; if it was to close faith formation and discipleship would be lost. Roger Lawler stated that the after use of a school plays a role in value to the community and 20% would capture this. Maureen Sutherland pointed out that if a school were to close then it wouldn't have much effect on the economy because the people aren't leaving, only the students. With value to students weighing 50% it would show that the main priority is the students. Dave Bennett agrees with 50% for the student; should value to board and community have the same weight? Maureen Sutherland believes that 20% board and 20% community implies that we value the concerns of people in the community. Judy Nairn reiterated that this would also show the community that the primary concern is not money. Brian Page pointed out that the value to community and economy combined is greater than the value to the board and this would support the notion that the board's not solely concerned about money.

CONCENSUS: Value to Student: 50%
Value to Board: 20%
Value to Community: 20%
Value to Economy: 10%

4. Discussion – Value to the Community

Dave Bennett began by saying that the format has changed considerably from last time and that as many questions as possible were changed to have YES/NO or checklist answers to make it more user-friendly. Categories were combined wherever possible to avoid repetition.

Roger Lawler pointed out that the relationship with the parish is covered under the value to student section and not under value to community.

John Shewchuk questioned where the 8 kilometre value came from under value of the school if it is the only one in the community. Dave Bennett explained that community was an ambiguous term and 8 kilometres was chosen because the Ministry uses this number for funding purposes.

Chuck Williams asked if we could be more specific about school grounds. At certain schools, Waterloo soccer has an agreement with the board and they have invested a lot of money into the soccer fields. Roger Lawler indicated that the students use city-owned park land. Brian Page pointed out that there are instances where a baseball field overlaps both properties. Judy Nairn thought there should be a question regarding community investment in the grounds. Roger Lawler amended this to ask how a closure would affect green space. Dave Bennett stated that there are two aspects to that question: functional and legal. Roger Lawler gave the example of how the closure of St Daniel would affect the Stanley Park Community Association. Chuck Williams thought that these questions were important to ask even if it doesn't directly affect the outcome of a review.

Rick Boisvert thought that the historic relationship that the school and the community have should be acknowledged in the framework. Grandparents may have attended that school and are now volunteers at the school because they feel connected to it. Judy thought that the traditional role the school plays in community should be examined. Roger Lawler indicated that this could be included under value of the school if it's the only one in the community. The emotional attachment should be captured. Dave Bennett suggested adding a question that encompasses the cultural, historical, archeological, and spiritual significance of the school. In Bill Strauss's experience in school closures with the public board, closed schools have often become private schools.

Judy Nairn questioned whether more uses than just adult education should be considered for an after use to the building. Dave Bennett said that it is the marketability of the site that is examined; proximity to transit, located on a collector road, amount of parking, etc. may lend itself to a good use. We could ask about the attributes of the site that would lend itself to an after use. Chuck Williams pointed out that that would be looked at for all of the schools in a review. Roger Lawler indicated that we can't say that there are plans for an after use of one school because it would be perceived that the process is manipulated. It should be considered but it should not be a reason for the school to close. Fr. Charles Fedy indicated that this would essentially increase the score in the section and decrease the potential to be considered for closure. This seems counter-productive. Brian Page suggested raising this issue in the framework but not scoring it. Dave Bennett said that the Board may keep the property after a closure and lease it out. The community may still have access to the gymnasium and the grounds. Maureen Sutherland asked where the money from the sale of a school property goes. Roger Lawler responded that it gets put into a reserve for the construction of a new school. He reminded the committee that co-terminus boards get the first opportunity at the property and will only pay \$1 to purchase. Other buyers have to pay full market value. It is a risk that the school would be picked up by co-terminus boards and we would not receive any money.

Judy Nairn thought that a concern with parents might be that if a school is closed the students will be moved outside of their community. Dave Bennett responded by saying that reviews are conducted within planning areas. Planning areas are based on geographical location. If there is some major concern about this the local ARC can add it but it doesn't have to be included in the generic framework. Judy Nairn agreed that this may come into question at the reviewing of alternatives stage of the review and not at the valuation of schools stage.

5. Discussion – Value to the Economy

Roger Lawler thought that the question about local suppliers may not be relevant because a vender in Elmira, for example, may provide supplies board-wide but would increase the score in a review of St Teresa (Elmira). Rick Boisvert interpreted this question as a connection to the school, not necessarily the board. An example of this would be the school purchasing pizza from a local establishment for pizza lunches. Roger Lawler suggested rephrasing the question to ask if there are specific contracts with the school (i.e. food services, snow plowing).

Judy Nairn thought that the ability to attract development should be included. Bill Strauss thought that Places to Grow eliminates the need for this since the lands are designated so development will occur whether there is a school there or not. Rick Boisvert indicated that there is a perception that a school is a vibrant community and if the school ceases to exist the community will die. Roger Lawler suggested looking at the trend in housing development or the rate of change over in housing. Brian Page thought that the value of the school on potential brownfield development should be taken into consideration. An area without a school may affect the marketability of redevelopment of a brownfield site. Dave Bennett indicated that brownfield development is difficult to incorporate into enrolment projections. Roger Lawler stated that the Region has a 25 year plan with hard urban boundaries. Much of the growth will be infill development. This type of development doesn't necessarily generate students. Families may move to regenerating areas, such as Forest Hill.

Maureen Sutherland questioned the relevance of staff living in the same town. Dave Bennett indicated that this would only be examined if it was the only school in the community. It may be considered a major employer for the town.

6. Discussion – Value to the Student & Board

John Shewchuk asked if the cost of utilities and maintenance should be included as they have been factors in previous reviews. Dave Bennett indicated that these are included under operating costs.

Brian Page requested that the condition of portables be included in the section with number of portables.

Brian Page asked if the question regarding on-street parking on adjacent streets could be eliminated. Dave Bennett responded that in some cases, there are designated on-street areas for drop-off.

Brian Page wanted to clarify if the cost of transporting students includes all pupils or only transported pupils. Roger Lawler responded that it is transported pupils only and this should be clarified in the framework.

Brian Page brought to attention that the expenditures on teacher's salary is affected by salary scales and may not have any relevance. Bill Strauss noted that teachers switch schools and this would also have an effect. It could change yearly. Rick Boisvert interpreted this question as a flag for extra expenses on teaching; the school may have a ½ time teacher because it is too small to have a full time teacher and therefore, paying transportation costs. Roger Lawler suggested that this may indicate a potential savings if a closure occurred and two schools were amalgamated. Dave Bennett thought that this could be done on a per pupil basis for comparison sake. Roger Lawler indicated that this could then be compared to the board average to make it more meaningful.

Roger Lawler stated that the number of computers that a school has depends on the availability of computers in the students' homes. All resources will move and redistributed after a closure. Dave Bennett questioned whether the number of resources would be diluted once schools were amalgamated and this would be a disadvantage to some students. Roger Lawler explained that the social profile of the receiving school would be altered and therefore, students should have access to the same number of resources. Roger Lawler suggested adding a question to this section asking if these resources can be transferred. Judy Nairn pointed out that it may be beneficial to identify resources because then it can be incorporated into the solutions; in the past, receiving schools have had library improvements as part of the solution. She asked if the ARC is able to recommend things like transferring of technology. Dave Bennett responded that the Ministry guidelines do not restrict those kinds of recommendations. However, once the report is taken to the Board for approval, they have the opportunity to dispute, pass or reject the recommendations.

Brian Page thought that a question should be included under the safety section about whether or not a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) audit has been completed and the estimated cost of the suggested upgrades.

Judy Nairn questioned how the level of morale would be measured. Fr. Charles Fedy gave an example of St Agatha students leaving the school and attending another school and then returning because they were happier attending a smaller school. Perhaps this could be rephrased as the level of school spirit. Rick Boisvert thought that this information may be found in the EQAO surveys. Dave Bennett argued that children have nothing to compare this to unless they've been to another school. However, some schools do have more energy than others. John Shewchuk felt that this has to do with involvement and commitment from parents, students and staff. Maureen Sutherland thought this was an unfair question because English-as-a-second-language parents or parents doing shift work would be less likely to become involved. Joseph Gowing indicated that a school with low morale may have a negative affect if combined with a school with high morale. Lindsay Reinhardt pointed out that there is a question regarding the ability to attract volunteers under the program offerings section. Roger Lawler suggested moving this to quality of the learning environment rather than student outcomes. He indicated that attitudes will change over time but during the review people will be blinded with emotion. Perhaps we could ask school councils to identify their biggest challenges. Rick Boisvert wanted the opposite side examined also; they should have a place to brag about what their school is really good at.

Judy Nairn asked if a question could be included under internal physical space about the idea of open concept compared to classrooms with walls.

7. Next Steps

A meeting will be scheduled for Heather Cullen, Rick Boisvert, Chuck Williams, Dave Bennett and Lindsay Reinhardt to discuss the value to student section with specific focus on programming, supports and student outcomes.

Lindsay Reinhardt and Dave Bennett will revise the framework and generate an accommodation review policy. This will be circulated prior to the May 30th meeting.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.