

Sabrina Picard

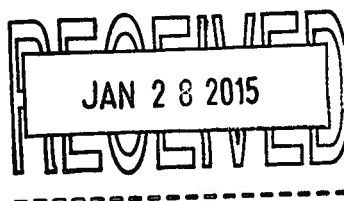
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From: Patrick Cormier
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2015 1:17 PM
To: Sabrina Picard
Cc: Lorie Hunter (lorieh472@gmail.com)
Subject: FW: Community School Alliance Follow-Up
Attachments: Community School Alliance Conference Call Minutes Jan 22 2015.docx; Response to PARG Review.docx; Letter to Minister Sandals Dec 16 2014 Ryerson Township.pdf

For incoming.

Patrick Cormier
 CAO
 Municipality of Temagami

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From: Kelly Cole [mailto:kcole@penetanguishene.ca]
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2015 2:47 PM
To: Scott Warnock; r lamb@tay.ca; Graham@gblair.ca; jcohen@bellnet.ca; gillies@tbaytel.net; warden@countyofrenfrew.on.ca; info@countyofrenfrew.on.ca; harlytwp@parolink.net; harlytwp@parolink.net; townhall@goderich.ca; lmccabe@goderich.ca; mayor@township.southalgonquin.on.ca; clerk@township.southalgonquin.on.ca; mitch@lakerangerealty.ca; clerk@huronkinloss.com; office@newbury.ca; bwiehle@elgin-county.on.ca; mmcdonald@elgin-county.on.ca; dmennill@malahide.ca; mcasavecchia@malahide.ca; Harry Hughes; rdunn@oro-medonte.ca; Lorie Hunter; Patrick Cormier; twpoconn@tbaytel.net; nelron241@gmail.com; mayor@eastferris.ca; john.fior@eastferris.ca; abarfoot@georgianbluffs.on.ca; alan.barfoot@grey.ca; mhackett@georgianbluffs.on.ca; lavalley@nwonet.net; ppilgrim@centrehastings.com; tigermerrill@icloud.com; massey.22@hotmail.com; mschnare@dawneuphemia.on.ca; harlytwp@parolink.net; tlow@nexicom.net; joevk@asphodelnorwood.com; moorevisneskie@gmail.com; lhudder@khrtownship.ca; mayor@twprideaulakes.on.ca; mdwyer@twprideaulakes.on.ca; kkruger@twp.norwich.on.ca; mlupton@zorra.on.ca; dmacleod@zorra.on.ca; phillipsr@xplornet.ca; clerk@tyendinagatownship.com; townthess@bellnet.ca; deke@notl.org; mgalloway@notl.org; nsantos@kingsville.ca; ddigiovanni@kingsville.ca; admin@ryersontownship.ca; ssage@clearview.ca; aberdeen@vianet.ca; info@armourtownship.ca; mayor@magnetawan.com; admin@magnetawan.com; mgivens@wellington-north.com; rtout@wellington-north.ca; mmciver@amtelecom.net; info@joebaptista.com; mavramovic@townshipleeds.on.ca; vivianbloom@bell.net; deputyclerk@hastingshighlands.ca; Basil Clarke; jmckinnon@ramara.ca; administration@valharty.ca; ChristianeP@valharty.ca; berniewiehle@gmail.com; sgawley@westelgin.net; mayor@tecumseh.ca; mlarose@iroquoisfalls.com; mshea@iroquoisfalls.com; ckelley@madawaskavalley.ca; mayor@madawaskavalley.ca; fran@adelaidemetcalfe.on.ca; ksmith@adelaidemetcalfe.on.ca; office@doriontownship.ca; edchambers@doriontownship.ca; nodabed@sympatico.ca; lindacr@northmiddlesex.on.ca; mayor@northmiddlesex.on.ca; renee.chaperon@stcharlesontario.ca; mayor@stcharlesontario.ca; sharon.vokes@grey.ca; alarabie@dryden.ca; cnutall@dryden.ca; ssaunders@county.peterborough.on.ca; ezt@ezt.ca; dmckay@ezt.ca; peggy.dupuis@oliverpaipoonge.on.ca; mayor.lucy@tbaytel.net; clerk@neebing.org; admin@noma.on.ca; landry@tbaytel.net; MarshaP@northmiddlesex.on.ca; deputyclerk@ryersontownship.ca; Jim Collard; Reycraft@sympatico.ca; 'Bill Rayburn' (cao@mldsx.ca); Marcus Ryan
Cc: Mayor Gerry Marshall
Subject: Community School Alliance Follow-Up

Hi everyone,

1/30/2015

Thanks to those who participated in the Community School Alliance conference call last Thursday afternoon.

For those who weren't able to join the call, I've included and attached information for your review.

1. Draft minutes attached from the Community School Alliance conference call Thursday January 22nd, 2015 (If you participated on the call, and I missed your name, please let me know)
2. Link from Bill Rayburn of Southwest Middlesex re: Proposed changes to how schools will be closed in Ontario
<http://www.lfpres.com/2015/01/21/shutting-the-doors>
3. Letter attached from the Steering Committee re: Response to PARG Review
4. Letter attached from Ryerson Township to Minister Sandals

We have scheduled a meeting room at the Ontario Good Roads conference on February 22nd at the Sheraton Centre Toronto in order for anyone who's attending the conference from the Community School Alliance have a chance to meet. I will be sending out a meeting request with the details shortly.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate.

Thanks,

Kelly Cole

Corporate Services Administrative Support/Assistant to the Mayor
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**COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALLIANCE MINUTES
CONFERENCE CALL
Thursday January 22, 2015 at 1:30pm**

Attendees:

Doug Reycraft, Southwest Middlesex
Bill Rayburn, CAO Southwest Middlesex
Jim Collard, Councillor, Niagara on the Lake
Markus Ryan, Councillor, Zorra Township
Mark MacDonald, CAO, Elgin County
Marsha Paylee, Clerk, Town of Ingersoll
Lorie Hunter, Mayor, Municipality of Temagami
Andrew Farnsworth, Deputy Clerk, Municipality of Ryerson
Ron Nelson, Mayor, O'Connor Township
Peggy Dupuis, Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge
Rosealee Evans, Municipality of Gilleses
Gerry Marshall, Mayor, Penetanguishene
Kelly Cole, Penetanguishene

1. INTRODUCTIONS

Doug Reycraft did a roll call of all those participating on the conference call.

2. UPDATE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALLIANCE

Doug Reycraft provided an update on the Community school Alliance. He informed the group that the Steering Committee drafted a constitution.

3. CONSTITUTION

Doug Reycraft reviewed the constitution with the group in order to get feedback and address any changes that should be made.

a) Objectives

The objectives section was reviewed by the group.

b) Membership

Doug Reycraft then reviewed the membership portion of the constitution. Each section was outlined and explained to the group. Questions were raised in regards to the NOMA's membership and how that type of organization would fall under the membership

c) Executive Committee

Section 4, executive committee, was then reviewed and discussed by group. A question was raised in regards to the structure of how new appointments of the executive committee would be accepted. It was determined that names of volunteers would be accepted prior to the first meeting.

There was also a question regarding the term of the executive committee. It was suggested by Mayor Gerry Marshall that the Chair and Vice-Chair be appointed for a two year period and other members would be appointed for a one year term and that would address the need for turnover.

A comment was made in regards to the constitution and the need to have a section outlining the mandate of the committee or a section for goals and objectives. This would assist in municipalities and organizations in approaching their Council for support. This mandate would address the ARC process, hubs and the funding formula.

d) Annual Meetings

Section 5, annual meetings, were then discussed and reviewed. No questions were raised in regards to the annual meetings.

e) Financial Matters

Section 6, financial matters was then reviewed and discussed. Doug Reycraft addressed that there may be an opportunity with AMO who may be interested in taking over the finance portion for the committee. There were no questions raised in regards to section 6.

f) Membership Fees

Section 7, membership fees was discussed with the group. Doug Reycraft suggested that the membership fee be determined after the constitution is finalized. There were concerns raised in regards to waiting to determine the fee as time seems to be of the essence

in addressing the Ministry. After some discussion, the group agreed that the constitution would be finalized and the committee should be appointed prior to determining the cost of the membership.

There was a consensus from the group that with the suggestions outlined in Section 4 – 7 and 3c would be amended by the steering committee, who will then finalize the constitution.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

There was discussion on the response to the Ministry that was sent on behalf of the Steering Committee.

The group also discussed the upcoming OGRA conference and that the group should meet which at the conference. It was determined that Kelly Cole will schedule a room at OGRA and will send an email to the group outlining the details of the meeting.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Response to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) Review

By the Community Schools Alliance

As co-chairs of the Community Schools Alliance (CSA), we are pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the December 4, 2014 document from the Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU).

We understand that the proposed revisions are the result of School Board Efficiencies and Modernization (SBEM) consultations and proposals from a Capital Advisory Committee, both of which involved only school board and EDU officials. While the inputs of both of these are essential in developing a PARG that properly addresses the pupil accommodation needs in the province, advice from Ontario's families and communities is also invaluable. It is hoped that the advice from the latter achieved through this consultation will be carefully considered before the new PARG is finally approved.

We agree that the current accommodation review process is in need of change. We agree with some of the changes proposed in the document but have concerns with others.

We have used the titles and headings in the EDU document to place our comments.

The Ministry of Education's (EDU) Fiscal Context

The suggestion is made that improving available program choices will lead to improved student achievement. Recent research by the Thames Valley District School Board on student achievement in consolidated schools showed no significant impact.

There is a strong assumption that closing small and underutilized schools will result in significant cost savings that will allow resources to be directed "to support student achievement". Recent research by Richard William Irwin of Western University suggests there is very little research to confirm this assumption.

Closing a school because of underutilized space may result in a significant increase in student travel time and actually have a negative effect on student academic achievement. Increasing the distance between a student's home and school increases the difficulty of the student participating in extra-curricular activities before and after school, thus diminishing the benefit of the total school experience. It makes it difficult for a secondary student to hold a part-time job. These costs are particularly acute in communities with a single school.

We recognize that there is a cost to maintaining underutilized space. That must be weighed against the cost of consolidation to students, families and communities as well as any increased operating and capital costs to the school board.

Context of the PARG Review

We welcome the proposal to “build better ties between schools and municipalities and other community organizations, and ensure more viable schools remain open” by having discussions on “community hubs”. Schools are a valuable part of the public infrastructure in every community and there are many examples of municipalities in which the function of one or more schools has been expanded to better and more fully serve the public that provides the necessary funding.

School Board Planning Process for Excess Space

Step 1 of the process lists a number of possible responses to changing circumstances that will best support a school board's student achievement strategy. A consultation process between school boards and municipalities, outside the formal accommodation review process, would be helpful in allowing the exploration of such responses within the context of the specific needs of an individual community.

Current PARG and Proposed PARG Changes:

Role of the Committee

An Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) should be asked to provide a recommendation supported by a majority of its members to the school board. Only by receiving such a recommendation and its supporting rationale, are trustees able to learn of a community's opinion on how its needs and those of its students and families are best addressed. Where there are strong opinions that differ with those of a majority of the ARC members, minority reports to school boards have frequently been used to express those opinions.

Committee Membership

ARC members should include parents as well as representatives of the community and the municipality. Members of the school board's administration and the principal(s) of the school(s) involved should attend every meeting to enable ARC members to get direct and timely information, but should not be members of the ARC. The resource support of school board employees is essential if the ARC is to provide an informed opinion to the trustees.

Municipal Involvement

Municipal representation on an ARC should be an option offered to municipal councils. The suggestion that municipalities be able to provide input only through public delegations would result in the municipal role being only a token one. Limiting the input of a municipal councils to single five or ten minute presentations, and only if application to do so has been formally made days in advance, would make the municipal role very superficial.

Timelines

Shortening the minimum process to five months with two open public meetings leads one to the conclusion that public input is not important. In order for an ARC to hear from interested members of the public and have an informed and thorough discussion of the information needed to provide a credible report to trustees, sometimes more than the current minimum of four meetings is needed. Members of the public should have the opportunity to hear and consider the reports and other information presented to the ARC by the school board administration before making their own presentations. Often some ARC members wish to meet with municipal councils and/or other groups outside the formal process to gain information. This all takes time and compressing the process will risk bad decisions and irreparable damage to communities.

Optional Shortened Process

It is difficult to envision the circumstances that would justify eliminating the requirement for establishing a committee, particularly in a rural area. The decision to shorten the process, if it believed that the circumstances to justify it do exist, should only be made with the support of a majority of the members of an ARC.

This proposal contradicts the principles of an open, transparent and democratic decision-making process.

Reports and School Information Profiles (SIPs)

As indicated above, we believe that it is important for an ARC to deliver a recommendation to the school board so that trustees will have a sense of a community's opinion.

We also strongly believe that a SIP should include a report on the value of the school(s) to the community and to the local economy. The schools may belong to the school board but the students belong to the community in which those students live. That community provides the facilities and infrastructure that affects the lives of the students

outside the walls of the school. We recognize that such a report may be problematic for the school board administration to provide and suggest that the municipality(ies) should be invited to develop it.

Additional Comments

The PARG proposed revisions fail to require any consideration of the impact of a school closure on students, families and the community in a community that has only a single school compared to the impact in a community with multiple schools. This impact should be considered.

Too often our school boards and municipalities operate in silos. The proposed PARG does little to address this and may just make the silo walls thicker. Boards and municipalities serve the same public and fail that public if they continue to function in isolation. A process is needed to develop a collaborative approach to pupil accommodation.

Both current and proposed PARGs give school boards the absolute power to close a school. Even when compelling evidence is provided to justify keeping open a small or underutilized school, there is nothing a community or municipality can do to require a reconsideration of a closure decision. The Community Schools Alliance believes that such an option should exist and that the opportunity to appeal a closure decision to an independent third party should be created.

The Community Schools Alliance believes that a much better process is needed to determine changes to pupil accommodation and that the PARG now proposed will move us in the wrong direction. Until that better system is in place, we again call on the Minister of Education to impose a moratorium on disputed school closures.

These comments are respectfully submitted.



Mayor Gerry Marshall
Co-Chair



Doug Reycraft
Co-Chair



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705-382-3232 • Fax 705-382-3286 • www.ryersontownship.ca

December 16, 2014

Dear Hon. Minister Sandals,

The Township of Ryerson received late notice of the Ministry of Education's proposed changes to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), changes which now cause us deep distress.

In 2013, the Near North District School Board initiated an Accommodation Review for the Burk's Falls area, including Ryerson Township. The Board-preferred option relied on insufficient and hastily-prepared information that included, among others, a mathematical error on the order of tens of thousands of dollars. Only the rigor of the existing PARG, an overwhelming community response, and a demand for full disclosure saved an isolated rural school from closure. Residents and students from the Town of Magnetawan attested that the school in question was unsurpassed in quality of education and community involvement, and that it was the heart of the town.

Many of the proposed changes listed in the EDU's November 2014 PARG presentation could have a devastating effect on the social and economic viability of communities such as ours. Ministries and Ministers in the Federal and Provincial governments have a mandate to encourage growth in Northern Ontario communities. The proposed PARG changes could do more than hinder the progress we have made in recent years; they threaten to remove the core of our towns and destine our communities to eventual decay and demise.

Below are our comments on the categories of change listed in the November 2014 PARG presentation:

1. Role of the Committee

In a democratic society, the role of this sort of committee - with representation from the school board, parents/guardians, and members of the community - is to enact the democratic process and ensure that it is upheld. That is, all members of the affected communities participate, weighing the facts and public comments, to vote on a recommendation as a group. Consensus will often be difficult to reach, but it is a necessary conclusion to the process. Removing the committee's sole means of effecting change neither improves nor streamlines the process, but instead renders it ineffective.

2. Committee Membership

As discussed above, a successful Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) requires representation from all affected members of the community. Schools are central to the wellbeing of rural municipalities, performing multiple functions for all citizens. It will be noted that each and every resident of the affected community who pays taxes - to support education and schools near their homes - should be given the right to participate. School boards are often eager to seek partnerships with community groups in order to share the burden of facility costs, and rightly so, but those same community groups deserve a seat at the table when a closure is being considered.

Additionally, the chair of the ARC should be vetted for conflicts of interest: it has been our experience that mistrust is sown in the public where there is no perceived boundary between the chair and the school board.

3. Municipal Involvement

Ryerson supports the inclusion of municipal leaders in the accommodation review process. We suggest that the school board be required to extend an invitation to local municipal senior administration to participate on the ARC.

4. and 5. Timelines and Optional Shortened Process

Only the ARC itself should be given the power to alter the schedule for the review process, and no reduction should be made to the currently mandated minimum number of public meetings at four. Should the ARC, following a vote of all members, feel that a shortening of the process will not preclude its decision, then so be it. Five months is still sufficient time to have four public meetings and to conduct a fully transparent and open public consultation.

As for Section 5, it unwisely allows the school board to bypass the accommodation review process altogether. If approved, it appears that a board could close a facility with low enrollment without even being aware of the available options, and they could do so with no ARC and only a single public meeting. In our experience, the school boards have not proven themselves capable of accurately compiling or analyzing information, let alone conducting an objective review of their own facilities. A committee should be required in every accommodation review, if only to ensure that all interests are represented. This change to the PARG will result in hasty decisions, a burden that will eventually be laid at the feet of the Ministry of Education

6. Reports and School Information Profiles (SIP)

We agree that the school board's initial report should include a recommendation and supporting rationale for proposed options; the ARC requires a strong starting point for its discussions.

However, the current SIP criteria should not be changed. An accurate description of a school's value to the community and to the local economy is essential. Facility details and school enrollment projections are necessary, but to rely on these alone is to view the issue out of context. A doctor does not ignore their patient's lifestyle when diagnosing illness, and a building can only be partially described from inside its own walls.

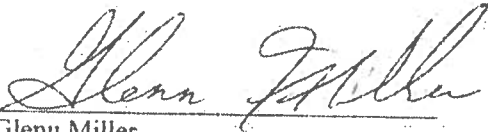
Having witnessed first-hand the difficulties and complexity inherent in the accommodation review process, the Township of Ryerson strongly cautions against a reduction in community participation. The onus should remain on the school board to justify the closing of a school, and that closing should be presented and defensible in the context of its community and in the best interest of its community.

Finally, we would like to comment on the incredibly short timeline allowed for consultation on this matter. For a government that speaks often on the benefits of transparency and open public consultation, this appears to be a disappointingly tight and closed process. Ryerson is aware of no formal notification from the Ministry of Education, instead receiving the plea to submit comments from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). That AMO correspondence, dated December 9, 2014, states a comment submission deadline of December 18, 2014 and a January 2015 release date for the new guidelines. When the accommodation review for a single school - under the proposed guidelines - is allotted a minimum of two and a half months, your Ministry's duty to consult on this issue appears inadequate at only half of that reckless schedule.

Considering that the Township of Ryerson and our neighbours recently participated in an accommodation review, and considering that the EDU's proposed changes to the PARG include greater inclusion of municipal perspectives, it is greatly disappointing to feel shut out of this decision making process. Please give serious consideration to our comments in your final decision. Please also forgive any mistakes or misunderstandings we may exhibit in this letter regarding the PARG and the proposed changes; we did not have time to prepare sufficient comments.

In these times of fiscal difficulty, we ask the Province to spare our struggling rural schools from budget cuts that could so negatively affect the future of our children and our communities.

Sincerely,



Glenn Miller,
Reeve, Township of Ryerson

cc. Premier Kathleen Wynne, MP Tony Clement, MP Jay Aspen, MPP Norm Miller, MPP Victor Fedeli.

