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Continue school renovations: Community tells DEC



Mark Rickard | Bugle Observer

Bath Community School parents and supporters urged the Anglophone West District Education Council (DEC) to go back to the future in their small community, urging the district council to ask the province to reverse a decision to halt renovations of the former Bath Middle School.

DEC members and senior staff conducted a school sustainability study meeting on Saturday, outlining the steps underway to study elementary and middle schools in Florenceville-Bristol and Bath. But David McTimoney, district superintendent, acknowledged possible outcomes for Bath Community School must also consider the nearby former Bath Middle School. Work on that facility was halted in the middle of an extensive renovation after asbestos was discovered in the school.

In September the province issued a tender to demolish the unfinished project, but that decision was reversed by Premier Blaine Higgs, who said no action would be taken until the district conducted a school sustainability of the K-8 schools in the Carleton North area. The DEC responded by cancelling a planned sustainability study for the Oromocto area and asking for the study in Carleton North.

McTimoney said the existing Bath Community School, the former elementary school, has limited physical space, an elementary-sized gymnasium for middle school students, a library housed in a portable classroom, no changing rooms, no space for speech therapy, school intervention workers or teacher assessments and a small kitchen.

"There is no sprinkler system, no modern ventilation system. There is some asbestos on pipe fittings and floor tiles which is being managed safely by trained staff. There is no elevator, so the second floor is not wheelchair accessible," McTimoney said.

"If you were to complete the renovations [at Bath Middle] as planned, recognizing there is a cost, the challenges would be different, correct?" one parent asked McTimoney.

"The challenges to space would be relieved if we were next door," the superintendent said. "But when you think of the school as an organization, academics, staff, those challenges and benefits would remain the same. But if you think in terms of building, that's a bigger building, more elbow room, bigger gym. The challenge that seems to rise to the surface is financial."

"If the building was finished next door, everything on that list would be eliminated,' said Shawn Kilfoil, parent school support committee member. "I think that's what everyone wants to focus on, outside of the financial aspects."

Gerald Sullivan former Bath Middle School principal, said the community already went through the study process four years ago when residents decided to support closing down the elementary school and moving all students into a renovated middle school.

"Why are we in this situation again, putting our community through everything ... going through presentations and the end result was signed off by the minister at the time, signed off by the DEC," Sullivan said.

Other parents told the DEC a renovated Bath Middle School would fill the community's needs.

"It would have been nice to have the blueprints and financials on that building [Bath Middle] in addition to this building [Bath Elementary]," Margaret Johnson said.

The superintendent said the study had three possible outcomes, maintain the status-quo at Bath Community School, provide for repairs to Bath Community School, or close Bath Community School along with other elementary and middle schools in Florenceville-Bristol and build a new K - 8 school able to accommodate 650 students.

Continuing renovations at Bath Middle School was not listed as a possible outcome.

McTimoney said a proposed new school would include 32 general instruction classrooms, four kindergarten classrooms, two gymnasiums with change rooms, early childhood development room, multi-function classrooms, science room, resource/special care classrooms, music rooms, art rooms, performing arts/theatre classroom, guidance/visiting professionals' offices, a student government room and library/media centre.

"When the DEC makes a decision on a school's future, if it is anything beyond a status quo, then government has a decision to make. But in this particular case, even if it is status quo, government has a decision to make [about Bath Middle School]. Government has to be involved in a decision here," he said.

Parents in Bath and Florenceville-Bristol can respond to the study in January. The council will make a decision and recommendation on the future of the Carleton North schools in March.