

Meeting Regarding Sustainability Reviews at Local Schools
Tuesday, November 7th, 2006
Grovenor Community League Hall

MINUTES

In Attendance:

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| Cassandra Haraba (Chair) | - Grovenor Community League President & Liaison with Grovenor School |
| Dave Beckman | - North Glenora Community League Executive & Coronation Scenario Development Team |
| Ross Burse | - North Glenora Community League Executive & Coronation Scenario Development Team |
| Sue Huff, (left at 9:12 p.m.) | - Westglen Advocacy |
| Natalia Krawetz | - North Glenora Community League Executive |
| Bauni Mackay | - Coronation Scenario Development Team |
| Lynn Odyuski | - former School Trustee |
| Elizabeth Turner | - Coronation School Librarian |
| Kevan Warner | - involved in past review of McArthur School |

Absent: A representative of High Park School/Community League

1. **CALL TO ORDER** at 7:42 p.m. by Cassandra Haraba, Chair. Natalia Krawetz agreed to act as Secretary for this meeting.

2. **BUSINESS AT HAND**

Cassandra introduced the **purpose of the meeting**: to strategize about how to effectively deal with the current (and upcoming) sustainability reviews. The attachment, *Background Information*, describes the content shared at the meeting. The group decided to focus on trying to extend the process timeline as outlined below.

Action Items:

- Contact the schools that were identified for sustainability review and their community leagues, to push the EPSB for a better timeline.
 - Start first with those in the immediate vicinity that are involved in the review: **Dave, Bauni and Elizabeth** will inform Coronation School Council and North Glenora Community League. **Cassandra** will contact High Park School Council and its Community League, and inform Grosvenor School Council and its Community League.
 - Time permitting **Dave, Elizabeth and Bonnie** will contact the rest of those involved in this year's review: Lendrum, Mill Creek/Ritchie, Montrose, Mount Pleasant, Mount Royal, and Newton. Then they will contact the rest of the 40 schools that will be affected by review (see EPSB *Appendix IV – Schools Identified in the Ten-year Facilities Plan 2007-2016*)

- **Dave** will draft a form letter to the EPSB (and circulate it to interested School Council's and Community Leagues who may use it as a template) requesting a more extended timeline, on the following grounds:
 - Given that this is a brand new, untested process and these schools (e.g. Coronation) are the first to be reviewed, there has not been sufficient time for the school, the community, and the EPSB to prepare. For example, the provision of information back from the EPSB to the community has not been timely. Moreover, the timeline is so tight that representatives of North Glenora Community League/Coronation School will be unable to attend the EPSB meeting because the Public Engagement Meeting for Coronation School is scheduled for the same date and time.
 - We would like an opportunity to meet as a group with the schools and community leagues affected by this year's review, to determine the potential for joint-solutions.
- **Cassandra** will draft a *Notice of Motion Re: A Process for a Trustee to Initiate Action on Selected Concerns* (that the review process does not meet the principles of natural justice). She will ensure that a Trustee is contacted to introduce it at the next EPSB Meeting (November 21st).
- **Cassandra** will contact the EPSB Secretary, Ann Sherwood, to ask to be put on the agenda for the November 21st Board meeting (re-extending the timeline). She will arrange for media presence.
- Schools and Leagues represented on the above EPSB agenda item will be asked **by those who have contacted them** to fill the meeting chambers with participants, to show support.

3. **ADJOURNMENT** at 9:30 p.m.

Background Information

The Current Educational Philosophy Puts Community Schools at a Disadvantage (Lynn)

- Edmonton Public School's mission for the past decade has been as the groundbreaker for the implementation of the school-of-choice concept and site-based decision making, in concert with the Province's orientation. The implementation of this concept - whereby parents can choose which schools their children attend without regard to the neighbourhood in which they live is very popular with parents, but has undermined the viability of community schools and hence community sustainability. Small schools support the development of neighbourhood social capital (compared to non-community based schools).
- Stantec was retained to undertake the viability and sustainability review using criteria which put the role of the school in the local community at the bottom of the list.
- Alternative Schools/Programs receive two kinds of funding: 1) a per student allocations, 2) the ability to charge additional fees to the parents. As a result they have larger budgets. This puts community schools at a disadvantage. There is a need for a level playing field.

The Role of the Trustee is At Issue (Lynn)

- The Province wants Trustees to carry out the Provincial mandate, but Trustees are elected by the community to reflect its values and wishes. There is no consensus amongst individual Trustees about which role to fulfill.

Strong Fiscal Pressures Make Getting Rid of Surplus Space Highly Desirable (Lynn)

- The Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) is penalized for wasted space. The Province has tightened its funding formula for plant operation and maintenance. If there is surplus space, none of that space receives Provincial funding AND every used square foot is penalized a set amount for every surplus square foot as well; in other words, there is a double penalty). The Province's stance is to provide no new schools until the issue of existing surplus space is addressed. So the EPSB is under great fiscal pressure to get rid of space.
- Boards have their fiscal flexibility further reduced because they are no longer able to move funds between allocations for education and for plant operation.
- Because the Province has now taken over the collection of school taxes, this has eliminated the potential for the local community to increase its school taxes to fund local schools – except by plebiscite.

There Are Serious Implications for Schools in Mature Neighbourhoods (Lynn, Kevan)

- Mature neighbourhoods tend to have schools with surplus space (owing to demographic shifts). (It is difficult to deliver quality education when school size falls below 100. Split classes work well but not triple splits.) Thus these neighbourhoods, nearest the city's core, are the most vulnerable in sustainability reviews. The potential for mass closure of such schools would result in deterioration of the quality of life in the urban core.
- School infrastructure in mature neighbourhoods has been deteriorating. It's been lack of funding from the Province that has allowed this deterioration.
- Any school built before 1963, i.e., any school in a mature neighbourhood, is on ground owned by the School Board, not the municipality. The Board gets the money from the sale and could use that to fund operations and maintenance of its other schools. Thus under the current philosophy it's in the EPSB's best interests to sell.
- The potential closure of schools in mature neighbourhoods is not just a school issue; it affects the quality of the neighbourhood. But because the Municipal Government Act and the School Act are not compatible, it's difficult to get the City of Edmonton and the EPSB to act in concert.

The Sustainability Review Process is Flawed (Dave, Bauni, Elizabeth)

- The biggest challenge is the process timeline. The timelines are far too tight. The EPSB is not meeting its deadlines regarding the provision of information back to the community.
- Communities have not been properly informed.
- Satisfactory answers are lacking (e.g., the EPSB representatives won't clarify how sustainability criteria are to be met).
- Schools are being pitted against each other as if this is a competition. There is a need to bring affected neighbourhoods together to determine if and how they can work together to develop joint solutions.
- The overall process is untested. These first nine schools are the guinea pigs.
- Trustees are not visible and don't appear to be involved.
- The process doesn't meet the principles of natural justice.

Elements to Consider in Taking Action (Kevan)

- Narrow the focus (e.g., to the process itself, especially during the critical period which is until December)
- Make sure you know what you are fighting: Sustainability? Closure? They are not the same thing.
- Know your resources (don't spread yourself too thin).
- Know which parts of the process are vulnerable to change.

Possible Actions (other than those dealt with under Action Items in the Minutes)

- Using the courts: Threat of having to (personally) pay costs to other parties if the case is lost can be enough to persuade people to give up. (Kevan)
- Longer-term: Network with upcoming parents so they don't think of sending their children to a community school as second best. (Sue)

Open Community Forum
Coronation School Sustainability Issues
North Glenora Community League Hall
Wednesday, November 8, 2006

MINUTES

Organized on behalf of the North Glenora Community League (NGCL) by
Dave Beckman, 2nd Vice-President, NGCL (Chair)
Natalia Krawetz, Secretary

Invited Speakers

- Bruce Miller, MLA
- Bauni Mackay, Coronation Scenario Development Team

About 40 people attended. Don Williams (our elected School Trustee) was invited but could not attend; his wife attended as an observer, on his behalf.

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1. **CALL TO ORDER** at 7:15 p.m. by Dave Beckman (Chair).
 2. **PURPOSE:** To solicit community input on appropriate actions to take regarding the sustainability review process as it affects the future of Coronation School.
 3. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**
Dave described the sustainability review process and the issues associated with it. (The attachment outlines a detailed chronology of the review process and associated events.)

Why This Review is Happening

Like every other board in Alberta, Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) has a deficit. As part of a plan to get boards to rationalize their allocation of resources, the Province is refusing to fund new schools until the EPS deals with the issue of existing surplus space. *Explanatory note: The EPS is penalized for wasted space. The Province has tightened its funding formula for plant operation and maintenance. If there is surplus space, none of that space receives Provincial funding AND every used square foot is penalized a set amount for every surplus square foot as well; in other words, there is a double penalty. Moreover, inner city schools have surplus space due to declining enrollments and neighbourhoods in outlying areas with large numbers of families have no schools. Since 1993/4 when the Province took over the collection of school taxes, school boards no longer have the power to levy additional taxes to raise funds for schools. It is up to the Province to provide the funding; the Province's stance is to provide no new schools until the issue of existing surplus space is addressed. So EPS is under great fiscal pressure to get rid of under-used facilities.*

Possible Outcomes of A Sustainability Review

As outlined by EPS, one or more of the following:

- Changing program(s)
- Relocating program(s) in or out of the school
- Closing program(s) or school
- Moving grades in or out of the school
- Re-designating attendance areas or alternative program boundaries
- Combining individual schools to create multi-campus sites
- Adjusting enrollment limits
- Status quo.

What Happens If School Closure is Announced

Changes in the School Closure Policy would mean no provision for public consultation about a closure until after the EPSB has made such a recommendation to the Province (estimated at March 2007 for such schools, with actual closure by June). There are two cases where closure has been successfully challenged: McArthur and Westglen. Strathearn took court action and won the first round but withdrew; the threat of having to personally pay costs to other parties if the case was lost on appeal can be enough to persuade people to give up.

Of the three schools closed last year: Strathcona was sold, and Allendale and Wellington are vacant; but as a result of arson, EPS spent funds for Wellington's repair.

School closure can have the following negative impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood:

- Stress on children in moving schools, breaking and forming friendships.
- Degradation of the property from lack of care and vandalism. (The positive impact of living in the neighbourhood whose school you attend and being watched by the neighbours, discourages antisocial behaviour and the destruction of community property.)
- Increased crime in the area (because of the lack of people present during the day) and vandalism.
- Fewer new families with young children (or planning to have children) moving in. Some existing families will move out, in order to locate near a functioning school.
- Decline in property values.

Disposition of school property is up to EPS. 50% of the 199 EPS schools are over 50 years old. All of these schools (including Coronation) are on land owned by EPS (as opposed to the City). For example, half of the land that forms the inner core of North Glenora (135 – 139 Streets between 109 and 109A Avenues) is owned by EPS. One participant valued such land at \$500,000.00 per acre (\$2,000,000 if the land was used for high-rises). Thus EPS could sell the land and use the money to pay off its debt.

4. PRESENTATIONS BY INVITED SPEAKERS

Bruce Miller MLA has a strong interest in this issue as seven of the schools in his riding are affected by sustainability reviews in this and upcoming years. He believes that the school is the hub of a community and that closure will affect the entire neighbourhood. He was present at the EPS meeting when the review process was approved and noted that two of the Trustees dissented to the process. He concurs that the timelines are very tight. He believes that citizen action can make a difference, noting the strong positive impression made by Sue Huff (Westglen) when she gave an impassioned speech about the importance of community schools at that meeting.

Bauni Mackay has had extensive involvement in education issues and is a member of Scenario Development Team for Coronation School (established to deal with responding to the sustainability review). She takes great issue with the nature of the consultation process and its timelines, and specifically noted the following:

- The highly structured process offers little or no opportunity to receive answers to the questions that are uppermost on participants' minds.
- The decision-makers (Trustees and Superintendent) are not present. Thus there is no opportunity to directly influence them or to get clear answers.
- The timelines are so tight that they strongly inhibit the necessary information gathering and the ability for parents and community members to assimilate what is happening and take appropriate action.

5. CONCERNS EXPRESSED AT THE MEETING

The most pressing concern is that the timeline is too tight for any meaningful participation.

- There was a six to eight week delay in the EPS posting of essential information (for use by the School Council, etc. in this process) on its website. Even with this delay in providing material to the public, EPS consultants have refused to extend the timeline.
- Insufficient time (four weeks) precludes considering some options of merit, specifically:

The historic/architectural value of the school building. Coronation was built in the Bauhaus architectural style. There is some evidence that money can be saved by refurbishing the school and busing students into the area, rather than building new schools in outlying areas.

Regional approach. Several schools in the area are being considered at the same time (e.g., Grovenor and High Park along with Coronation). Again four weeks is not enough time for the three communities to get together and

determine the extent to which they could develop a mutually beneficial solution for the area.

Coronation is close to downtown and has good before- and after-school care for children. A marketing campaign could attract the children of parents who commute to the downtown. Again, time constraints prevent the exploration of this option.

Process is NOT transparent and thus the process is not trusted.

- **Decision makers are not visible.** The review process appears to be run by consultants to EPS reporting to administrators. Only consultants attend the meetings on behalf of the EPS. Neither the Superintendent nor our elected Trustees have attended. In fact, EPSB meetings are the same evenings as two of the public engagement meetings (including the one at Coronation). As a result, participants cannot get clear answers to question (such as the rationale behind selecting the specific schools for review in Year 1) or hope to directly influence decision makers.
- Members of School Council resent the manner in which options for sustainability have been presented. In fact, the School Council has been looking at program options for some time; however the EPS has turned down Council's program ideas (e.g., proposed science program rejected last year).

Opportunities for Community Involvement Are Too Limited

- The first focus of EPS has been on a meeting with parents of children attending the school in question. The community was not invited. The role of the community league was not considered. Community homeowners pay school taxes. All community residents elect school trustees. As a result, they all are affected and have a right to be involved.
- It is important that School Councils and Community Leagues work together to frame this as a community issue, as well as a school issue.
- It is important to talk with your neighbours about the importance the potential impact of this review and of making your voice heard on this issue.

The approach with respect to reviewing the sustainability of schools in the same geographic area is piecemeal and thus disadvantages the area.

- The lack of a regionally-based approach encourages competition between schools battling to survive.
- Some schools in the same region are up for sustainability review this year, and some in the next few years. What happens when, say, Coronation closes and

students move to Woodcroft only to have it close the next year? There is insufficient consideration of the negative impact this will have on students and of the potential outflux of families from these communities as a result. An entire geographic area of mature neighbourhoods could end up community without schools.

The necessary information has been lacking.

- Sources and uses of data are at issue. For example, EPS has data sources for population trends to which the public does not have access. Additionally, Coronation's viability changed from meeting two of the five criteria in June to none, in September; but no one can account for the change.

There appears to be no adequate way to factor 'non-quantifiables' into the final decision.

- While local conditions are included in text on the viability rating sheet, they cannot be quantified. Some attendees suggested that the close relationship between the school and the League (e.g., landscaping and playground initiatives) and the school's participation in the International Baccalaureate Program are not sufficiently accounted for in the overall viability assessment.
- Small schools are of value. They can create positive outcomes. See National Clearinghouse for Education Facilities website <http://www.edfacilities.org/> (search: small schools).
- Not everything that is important can be quantified, but this process emphasizes quantifiable information such as enrollment statistics.

Community schools are disadvantaged

- The philosophical change from becoming a school system of choice to encouraging school 'boutiques' has devalued the strength of the community and of the traditional definition of what free public education system is supposed to mean. *Explanatory note: The playing field is NOT level. Alternative Schools/Programs receive two kinds of funding: 1) a per student allocations, and 2) the ability to charge additional fees to the parents. Public schools have lost the ability to charge fees (though a tax levy). This puts community schools at a disadvantage.*

6. ACTION ITEMS

Request that the timeline for the process be extended.

- **Dave** will prepare a letter to the EPSB on behalf of the Community League objecting to the timelines and the conflict with the November 21st meeting (the date/time of both the EPSB meeting at which extending the timeline is being requested to be put on the agenda, and the final Coronation meeting at which the community is supposed to attend).

Present a united front.

- Put the need for an extended timeline on the agenda of the November 22nd Multi-League Meeting (to be held at the NGCL Hall), especially since two of the other affected communities, Grovenor and High Park will be attending. Inform their Presidents in advance. **(C-Anne Robertson)**
- Contact the Presidents of the School Councils and the Community Leagues of the eight other affected communities and invite them to make a similar request to extend the timeline. **(Cassandra Haraba)**

Take control of the process.

- Consider boycotting the November 21st meeting and then inviting the School Trustees and the Superintendent to attend a meeting we organize, at another date in the near future. **Dave** said that implementation will depend on the EPSB's response to the timeline extension request.

Inform local residents.

- Investigate the potential of renting a mobile sign for the Hall grounds to inform local residents of the November 21st meeting. **(Natalia)** will investigate and report to Executive at its meeting on November 14th.

Give local residents a reason to be involved and make it easy for them to participate.

- Post all information on the NGCL website www.ngcl.org **(Donna Jackson,** League publicity).
- Investigate the potential of sending a special flyer to inform residents of the meeting and how it affects them. Consider distributing this flyer along with the pre-enrollment survey being prepared by the School Council for distribution to every household in North Glenora next week. **(Natalia/Dave)** will draft this for consideration at the November 14th League Executive meeting.)

In such material:

- Encourage all residents to prepare a written letter/statement about the importance of Coronation School and deliver it to the President of the School Council or to the November 21st meeting.
- Encourage parents to bring their older children to the meeting (being mindful that stress could be an issue, so not stress them out).

- Provide a list of contacts (e.g., School Board members, School Superintendent, City officials, Minister of Education) and simple form letters that are easily mailed, faxed, or e-mailed. Encourage residents to send them.
- Contact the Presidents of the School Councils and the Community Leagues of the two other affected communities in our immediate vicinity (Grovenor and High Park) and invite them to have their members attend the November 21st meeting as a show of support for an extended timeline. **(Dave)**

Approach the media to make this issue more visible.

- Prepare a press release and media backgrounder that place the issue in the larger context (and stressing the lack of transparency and lack of leadership) – at the very least, as it affects the 9 communities under review at this time (and the upcoming almost 40). **(Natalia)**

Note: Cassandra Haraba (Grovenor) mentioned an informal meeting of interested parties on November 7th at which she agreed to draft a Notice of Motion Re: A Process for a Trustee to Initiate Action on Selected Concerns (that the review process does not meet the principles of natural justice). She will ensure that a Trustee is contacted to introduce it at the next EPSB Meeting (November 21st).

Dave requested that those interested in helping implement the action items put their names and phone numbers on a list after the meeting.

6. **ADJOURNED** at 9:18 p.m. by Dave Beckman (Chair)

Attachment: Sustainability Review Process Timelines And Related Events

May 23, 2006: EPS approved the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2007-2016* and identified 97 schools to be assessed on one of: sustainability (a new component), program fit, or facility alteration. How schools were categorized for assessment in which years is not stated (see Memo of October 10, 2006 from the EPS Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Trustees posted at www.epsb.ca/board/oct10_06/item05.pdf)

June 2006: Dave noticed a proposed change in the school closure process posted on the EPS website. In the old process, public meetings were held with affected school communities to discuss the viability of school closure before the EPS made a recommendation for closure to the Province. The new process excludes the public until after the EPS recommendation is made (see <http://policy.epsb.ca/fl.bp/shtml>) In response, the League Executive called a meeting of the Executive (see *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the North Glenora Community League. . . Saturday, June 10, 2006*, posted on the NGCL website, www.ngcl.org). As a result, Dave sent a letter of concern to the EPS behalf of the League. There has been no response.

Sept. 14, 2006: Schools were profiled and benchmarked. *Note: Coronation's profile changed from meeting 2 of the 5 criteria specified in June to meeting none in September. No reason has been given for the change.* Those schools identified for Years 1 to 3 were ordered in priority based on those ratings, that is, those with the poorest ratings are to be reviewed in the first year (i.e., 2006). They are Coronation, Grovenor, High Park, Lendrum, Mill Creek/Ritchie, Montrose, Mount Pleasant, Mount Royal, and Newton.

| Coronation School Profile http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/ViabilityPDF/11.pdf | | |
|--|---|--|
| Criterion | Benchmark | Coronation |
| Total no. of students | 140 | 88 (down 32.3% since 2002) |
| No. students in attendance area, who actually attend the school | 280+ in area, with 140+ attending this school | 178 students living in the area; 43 go to this school |
| Student space & cost | 50% of existing student space funded by provincial plant operation & maintenance allocation OR Provincial utilization rate is 50+% | 39% AND 58% |
| School condition | Provincial Facility Audit Score: less than 700 OR District Capital Inspection Rating: Acceptable to excellent | Provincial Facility Audit Score: 390 AND District Capital Inspection Rating: Marginal |
| Location of & access to other schools (within a 1.6 km radius – the considered walking distance) | Less than 3 EPS schools with learning space available | 6 others EPS schools available. <i>Note: 3 of these (Grovenor, Westglen, Woodcroft) are also on the sustainability review list this year.</i> |

October 4, 2006: Superintendent met principals of schools proposed for Year 1 sustainability and program fit reviews.

October 10, 2006: EPSB accepts *Report on the Proposed 2006 – 2007 Annual Implementation Plan*; two Trustees dissented. Nine schools, including Coronation, announced as part of sustainability review in Year 1 (2006).

October 11, 2006: EPS contacts principals of schools approved for Year 1 sustainability and program fit reviews.

October 16, 2006: EPS begins individual school communities engagement.

October 17, 2006: EPS representatives (consultants) met with parents of children attending Coronation School. Neither the League nor the community residents are informed or invited to attend. Review process requires formation of a Scenario Development Team to work with EPS consultants.

October 18 – 20, 2006: Coronation School Scenario Development Team formed:

- June Austen (parent)
 - Aaron Benoit (parent)
 - Sheila Bilodeau (parent)
 - Scott Laurie (parent)
 - Leslie McGlennon (parent)
 - Mark Sulz (parent)
 - Trini Deyto (Little Treasures Daycare)
 - Bauni MacKay (community resident at large)
 - Elizabeth Turner (librarian representing Coronation School staff)
 - Patti Wilcox (teacher representing Coronation School staff)
 - Roma Paul, Principal (representing Coronation School)
- Principal invites League representation.

Oct. 24, 2006: At NGCL Executive Meeting, League agrees that Dave Beckman and Ross Burse will represent it on Scenario Development Team.

Oct. 30, 2006: Scenario Development Team Meeting with EPS consultants.

Nov. 1, 2006: Open Forum advertised in NGCL newsletter (distributed that week) and on website.

Nov. 7, 2006: Meeting organized by Cassandra Haraba and convened at Grovenor Community League Hall to discuss sustainability reviews at local schools. Representatives of Grovenor and North Glenora Community Leagues and of those involved with school advocacy issues attended.

Nov. 7, 2006:

- EPSB meeting has third (final) reading of proposed amendments to School Closure Policy (<http://policy.epsb.ca/fl.bp/shtml>)

Nov. 8, 2006

- Open Community Forum hosted by NGCL

Nov. 14, 2006:

- Scenario Development Team Meeting with EPS consultants (Coronation School).
- NGCL Executive Meeting (League Hall), which had been changed *from* Nov. 21 because of the need to attend the public meeting about Coronation (see below).

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

Nov. 21 – Dec. 5, 2006: Public engagement meetings with parents and communities of each of the affected schools.

Nov. 21, 2006:

- Final public engagement meeting with parents and communities of Coronation School.

Nov. 28, 2006

- EPSB meeting.

Dec. 2006: Administration reviews scenarios and forwards recommendations to Superintendent that require his approval (e.g., boundary or program changes).

Jan/Feb 2007: Administration forwards recommendations to Board that require its approval (e.g., school or program closure).

Jan 16, 2007: EPSB meeting on *Recommendations Related to Year 1 Review*. School closure process initiated, if required.

Jan. 17 – Mar 23, 2007: Superintendent and Board decide on recommendations (formal approval).

Mar 13, 2007: EPSB meeting on recommended school closures. *Note: such schools would close by June 2007.*