

## **CORONATION SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW: FAQs**

### 1. What is a sustainability review?

A sustainability review is a new component introduced this year as part of the Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) Ten-Year Facilities Plan ([www.epsb.ca/board/oct10\\_06/item05.pdf](http://www.epsb.ca/board/oct10_06/item05.pdf)) and is “aimed specifically at ensuring the sustainability of schools over the long term. . . . It also forms the basis of an Annual Implementation Plan, which identifies planning strategies to be undertaken at selected district schools to ensure the long-term viability of the school or adjacent schools.”

### 2. Why was this sustainability review component introduced?

*To rationalize the use of school space and get the Province to fund new schools in the outlying areas of Edmonton.*

As part of a plan to get school boards to rationalize their allocation of resources, the Province is refusing to fund new schools until the issue of existing surplus space is addressed. In Edmonton, neighbourhoods in the outlying areas with large numbers of families have no schools. Meanwhile there are mature neighbourhoods in the city’s inner core with surplus space, due to declining enrollment as their populations age.

EPS is penalized for surplus space as the Province has tightened its funding formula for plant operation and maintenance: If there is surplus space in a school, none of that space receives Provincial funding. Hence the incentive to reduce surplus space; and that surplus space is in mature neighbourhoods.

### 3. Which schools are under sustainability review?

This table shows the 7 schools under review this year and the 32 more to go.

<i>Schools Identified for Sustainability Review in the Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2007 – 2016</i>			
Year 1 (2006-2007)	Years 2 & 3	Years 4 – 6	Years 7 - 10
Coronation Grovenor High Park Mill Creek/Ritchie Montrose Mount Royal Newton	Allendale Beacon Heights Britannia Donnan Eastwood Gold Bar Hardisty Malmo Parkdale Rio Terrace Sherwood Westglen Woodcroft	Avonmore Belgravia Duggan Glendale Highlands Inglewood James Gibbons Lawton McArthur McCauley R. J. Scott Riverdale Rutherford Spruce Avenue	Capilano Clara Tyner King Edward Rundle Waverley

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4. What are the 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.

5. If there are so many possible outcomes, why are you worried about the possibility of closing Coronation School?

We have two reasons.

*Reason #1: Coronation’s benchmarked ratings and their unexplained change from June to September, suggest it is near the bottom of the heap.*

When schools were profiled and benchmarked, Coronation School was identified one of six with the poorest ratings. However, *Coronation’s profile changed from meeting two of the five criteria specified in June to meeting none in September. No reason has been given for the change.*

<b>Coronation School Profile. September 14, 2006</b> <a href="http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/ViabilityPDF/11.pdf">http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/ViabilityPDF/11.pdf</a>		
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 <b>OR</b> Provincial utilization rate is 50+%	39%  <b>AND</b> 58%
School condition	Provincial Facility Audit Score: less than 700 <b>OR</b> District Capital Inspection Rating: Acceptable to excellent	Provincial Facility Audit Score: 390 <b>AND</b> District Capital Inspection Rating: Marginal <i>(See notes on rating changes)</i>
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 other EPS schools available. <i>Note: We count 5 (including Edm. X’n which is not fully accessible), of which 3 are on the sustainability review list.</i>

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*Reason #2: It is mature neighbourhoods, like North Glenora, that are the most vulnerable in sustainability reviews because of the incentive to sell the land on which such schools sit.*

50% of Edmonton's public schools are over 50 years old. These schools are in mature neighbourhoods. Any school built before 1963 (i.e., 50%+ of existing school stock) is on land owned by EPS, not the municipality. Should such a school close, EPS gets the money from the sale and could use that to fund operations and maintenance of its other schools and/or reduce its deficit. Given the pressure to reduce the deficit as well as to get the Province to fund new schools, the multiple closures of schools in mature neighbourhoods would have strong fiscal benefits to EPS – especially since the land in those areas is quite valuable in this strong economy. In North Glenora's case, EPS owns half of the land that forms the community's inner core (135 – 139 Streets between 109 and 109A Avenues). The potential for mass closure of such schools would result in deterioration of the quality of life in the ring of communities that surround the downtown. It would be ironic to have a revitalized downtown, enclosed by deteriorating and increasingly unsafe neighbourhoods.

#### 6. Why is it important for a neighbourhood to have a school?

Having a public school in your neighbourhood is part of the glue that makes a community a desirable place in which to live. It builds social capital by creating bonds between those who use the school and those who live in the neighbourhood (who may, in many cases, be one and the same). It creates an informal network of neighbourhood watchfulness that discourages antisocial behaviour, the destruction of community property, and other forms of crime. Moreover, a school is an amenity that encourages families to move into or stay in the area.

#### 7. What does Coronation School mean to North Glenora?

In North Glenora, the parents of Coronation School's students and the members of the North Glenora Community League have a 50+ year history of working together. Some of our projects are large scale and permanent:

- Developing a community plan which was approved by Edmonton City Council in 1998.
- Supporting the school's environmental education program by planning and constructing an outdoor classroom and landscaping the school grounds with indigenous plants.
- Designing and constructing new playgrounds, play areas, and pathways that integrate Coronation School with community lands in North Glenora's core.

We've had more modest projects, too. For example, Coronation's students made the table decorations for the League's Annual Turkey Supper this year. At that event we honored

Jo Tayler, a 26-year community resident, whose many contributions to North Glenora include such dedication to Coronation School that she has been named its Honorary Grandmother. In other words, our residents view the school as an essential part of the community's social fabric. They value the school, whether or not they have children enrolled in it.

8. What has happened to schools that were closed in the recent past?

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.

9. What does school closure mean for a mature neighbourhood like North Glenora?

Another nail in the coffin of community viability. A functioning community is so much more than a collection of housing units. It depends on a combination of people and places to form networks that give it a sense of identity.

Once closure is announced, we expect

- More stress on the affected children - in moving schools, breaking and forming friendships. We can see the possibility of that stress compounding if they are sent to another school that, in turn, is closed within the next few years.
- 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.

If the building is left vacant, we expect

- Degradation of the property from lack of care and vandalism.
- Increased crime in the area because of the lack of people present during the day.
- Fewer new families with young children (or planning to have children) moving in.
- Declining property values.

If the building is demolished and a new land use sought, we expect

- Proposals for higher-density and/or commercial establishments being located in the heart of our low density community, which would destroy its ambience and viability. Such a development has been proposed just south of us in Glenora, at the corner of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street and Stony Plain Road. We are aware that the City is interested in higher-density infill in mature neighbourhoods. And we are very aware of the lack of a legally-binding framework for appropriate development in mature neighbourhoods. In other words, there are guidelines but not laws. So any mature neighbourhood is in a very vulnerable position.

#### 10. What role does the Province play?

Decisions that affect the operations of our local schools are increasingly centralized.

Changes at the Provincial level mean that the playing field between public and alternative schools is far from level. Alternative schools have two funding sources: 1) the Province through a per student allocation, and 2) the parents of the enrolled students through additional fees such schools are able to charge. Public community schools have only one source: the Province. Public school boards have lost the ability to charge fees (through a tax levy) when the Province took over school tax collection in 1993/4. As a result alternative schools have larger budgets.

The potential negative impacts on our schools and neighbourhoods, indeed on the City's urban core, are the consequences of the Province's plan to get school boards to rationalize their allocation of resources. It is the Province that has pitted the need for schools in outlying areas against the surplus space issue in mature neighbourhoods. Moreover, school infrastructure in mature neighbourhoods has been deteriorating, making such schools less desirable to maintain. And it's been lack of funding from the Province that has allowed this deterioration.

#### 11. What role does the City play?

The potential closure of schools in mature neighbourhoods is not just a school issue; it affects the quality of the neighbourhood. We foresee the potential for mass closure of such schools leading to much higher density development in these areas, as well as the deterioration of the quality of life in the ring of communities that surround the downtown. Because the Municipal Government Act and the School Act are not compatible, it's difficult to get the City of Edmonton and the EPS to act in concert. We don't believe that the City has created any plan to manage the increasing redevelopment of mature neighbourhoods. That's why the North Glenora Community League is part of the Edmonton Federation of Community League's Mature Neighbourhood Action Group ([www.mnag.ca](http://www.mnag.ca)).

#### 12. But a recommendation for closure is not a fait accompli. Won't you have a chance to influence the process?

Not really.

Changes in the School Closure Policy (<http://policy.epsb.ca/fl.bp/shtml>) would mean *no meaningful provision for public consultation* about a closure until *after* the EPS Board has made such a recommendation to the Province (estimated at March 2007 for such schools, with actual closure by June). The North Glenora Community League convened a

special meeting and then sent a letter to EPSB objecting to these changes in June. We have yet to receive a reply.

There are two cases where closure has been successfully challenged: McArthur and Westglen (Note that both schools are up for sustainability reviews later in this review process.) 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.

### 13. Why do you say that they are taking the community out of community schools?

Schools are being examined individually, rather than on a community-wide (i.e., geographic) basis. Coronation, Grovenor, and High Park Schools are currently under review but two others, Glenora and Woodcroft, are not. We have had no time or opportunity to have area-wide meetings that include these schools, to look for ways to provide public education in the best interests of the area as a whole. Given the timeline and the current process, it is all each school can do to participate in the EPS process.

We are concerned about the impact on the children. Changing schools is very stressful. Should one of these schools be closed and parents of that school send their children in the subsequent year to a neighbouring school, such as Woodcroft, they may have to move their children, yet again, if it should be closed as a result of its sustainability review the following year.

### 14. What are your biggest problems with the process?

- Tight, unrealistic timelines. From a community perspective the process from brainstorming options to a final, public meeting is just four weeks long. This is far from enough.

The first focus of EPS was on a meeting with school staff and then with parents of children attending the school in question. At Coronation School, these meetings were on October 17<sup>th</sup>. The community was not invited, even though this is a community school and residents pay school taxes and elect school trustees. The League became involved with the first meeting of the School's Scenario Development Team which is to develop sustainability options (October 30<sup>th</sup>). The final meeting with EPS (and the first, official meeting between EPS and the general public in North Glenora) will be on Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>. So from a community perspective the process is only one month long. Any group can brainstorm options, but it takes time and research to figure out which of those options could be truly viable. And there are lots of others who live here but are not on the Team who are having a hard time coming to grips with what is happening, let alone its implications.

- Lack of Transparency/Availability of Decision-makers and of Information.

*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 are visible or appear to be involved. As a result, participants cannot get clear answers to questions (such as the rationale behind selecting the specific schools for review in Year 1 or the reasons why previous proposals for school revitalization were rejected) or hope to directly influence decision makers.

Moreover, we are concerned about the unmet commitment of EPS administration to provide information essential to our deliberations on its website, on time. Specifically, the information promised for late September was not posted until early November. In addition, we believe there are errors and omissions in the information which, if left unaddressed, may result in this review process being deemed inconsistent with fundamental rules of fairness and procedure.

#### 15. What do you want?

- We want the timeline extended until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, a three-month extension.
- We want timely, accurate information, including satisfactory explanations for the errors and omissions we have found in the EPS data, not only about Coronation School but also about other, affected schools.
- We want a geographic approach that includes all comparable schools within the 1.6 km designated region, so that we can optimize resources and options for the betterment of the area as a whole.
- In short, we want Coronation School and the other schools under sustainability review this year to be given a fair chance.

*Note: A Chronology of Events follows on the next page.*

## Sustainability Review Process: Chronology of 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 [www.epsb.ca/board/oct10\\_06/item05.pdf](http://www.epsb.ca/board/oct10_06/item05.pdf)

**June 2006:** EPS website posts proposed change in the school closure process excludes the public until after the EPS recommendation is made (see <http://policy.epsb.ca/fl.bp/shtml>) In response, the North Glenora Community League Executive sent a letter of concern to the EPS. There has been no response.

**Sept. 14, 2006:** Schools were profiled and benchmarked. 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 Year 1 (i.e., 2006).

**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.

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

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

**October 17, 2006:** EPS representatives (consultants) met with school staff and then 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 (community resident and Coronation School staff), Patti Wilcox (Coronation School staff), Roma Paul (School Principal). Principal invites League representation.

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

**Oct. 30, 2006:** First meeting of Scenario Development Team with EPS consultants.

**Nov. 1, 2006:** Open Forum advertised in NGCL newsletter (distributed that week) and on website ([www.ngcl.org](http://www.ngcl.org)).

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**Nov. 2, 2006:** Revised school profiles appear on EPS 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:**

- Second and last meeting of Scenario Development Team 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.*

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