



Rainy River District School Board
F.H. Huffman School Accommodation Review
Public Consultation

MINUTES

December 3, 2007 – 6:30 p.m.
Huffman School
Fort Frances, Ontario

Committee Members in Attendance:

Dan Belluz (Chair), Judy Eluik, Heather Campbell, Donna Kowalchuk, Laurie Holliday, Penny Newman, Gord McBride, Petrina Carlson, Kristin McCormick, Terry Higgins, Jan Adams, Angela Mainville, Brent Tookenay, Dianne Faragher

Accommodation Review Committee Resources:

Laura Mills, Raymond Roy, Kathie Zatulsky – recording secretary

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Welcome and Introduction

Dan Belluz, Chair of the Accommodation Review Committee, welcomed committee members, Board administration and the public. Chair Belluz explained that the Accommodation Review Committee was established by the Rainy River District School Board to conduct a community-based review regarding the future of F.H. Huffman School. The committee is comprised of Board staff, trustees, school councils, parents and community members. The committee has developed a School Valuation Framework for Huffman that will be used to consider the value of Huffman to the student, the community, the Board and the local economy. A minimum of four public consultation meetings is scheduled in order to gather feedback from the staff and the community. The process will take approximately seven months and a report with recommendations will be made to the Board for final approval. Accommodation Review Committee members introduced themselves.

History – How we got here

Heather Campbell, Superintendent of Education, explained that under the new Ministry guidelines regarding Pupil Accommodation, three schools (Donald Young, Huffman, Robert Moore) were identified as “prohibitive to repair”, meaning that the costs of repair exceeded other alternatives. The alternatives identified by the Ministry of Education were:

- 1) Status quo – keep the school open with minor repairs being completed with School Renewal funds.
- 2) Single school solution – rebuild single school
- 3) Multi-school Solution
 - i) Renovate/add to neighboring school
 - ii) Build new consolidated school
- 4) Retire School – close school and move students to neighboring school with no renovation or additions.

The Board will focus on Huffman School during the accommodation review process due to declining enrolment, cost of repair, close proximity to Robert Moore School, and Huffman is a feeder school to Robert Moore.

Pupil Accommodation Process

Heather Campbell explained that the Pupil Accommodation Policy (6.50) will allow the Board to study the operations and programs of Huffman School in accordance with Ministry guidelines. The Accommodation Review Committee has developed a customized school valuation framework for Huffman that will identify the value to students, value to the school system, value to the community and value to the local economy. It was noted that of all sections of the framework, the “Value to the Student” section is considered the most important and receives the most consideration. Four public consultation meetings will be scheduled over a seven-month period in order to give staff, parents and community members the opportunity to provide feedback.

Questions and Answers

There were no questions by the committee or public at this time.

School Valuation Framework

Heather Campbell presented the School Valuation Framework that was developed for Huffman School. The school profile outlined factual information about Huffman School. The school valuation template is intended to help schools in an objective process to identify values to the student, system, community and local economy.

Each section of the school valuation framework was reviewed, followed by a question and answer period. Under the section, “Value to the School System”, Laura Mills, Superintendent of Business, provided financial information regarding Huffman School. The financial report indicates that the school has revenues exceeding \$800,000 based on the 2007/08 budget. Classroom expenditures total \$700,000 with an additional \$300,000 for non-classroom expenditures, including transportation for a total of \$1M. This leaves the school with a \$200,000 deficit. The Board must then draw from other areas in order to support the school.

Feedback forms will be made available at the school for parents to complete. School Council members, staff, parents and community members are encouraged to attend the public consultation meetings to learn more about the process and have the opportunity

to ask questions. There will be three more public consultations over a six-month period which will be published in the local newspaper.

Questions and Answers

Gord McBride asked if the review process is local or mandated by the Ministry - are other boards following this process.

Heather Campbell responded that the Ministry of Education developed Pupil Accommodation Review guidelines to provide direction to school boards regarding the future of a school. The Board and other schools boards must follow the Ministry guidelines but can customize the School Valuation Framework to meet their needs.

Gord McBride asked how the projected enrolments for 2012 compare to the highest enrolments that Robert Moore School had.

Laura Mills, Superintendent of Business (committee resource), explained that projections for 2012 indicate a head count of 70 for Huffman School, while Robert Moore shows a projection of 360. Enrolment history for Robert Moore will be provided at the next public consultation.

Gord McBride asked if the school would remain open if the majority of parents wanted the school to remain open.

It was stated that this is why we are conducting an accommodation review of Huffman to determine the best needs of the students. No final decision has been made on the outcome of Huffman School. The purpose of the public consultation is to review the data in the School Valuation document and make a recommendation to the Board.

Terry Higgins indicated that parents are concerned about moving students to a larger school with larger class sizes. EQAO test scores at Huffman School indicate an improvement in student achievement. Parents feel that student achievement may suffer if students are moved to a school with larger class sizes. It is felt that students in smaller classes receive more help. Parents also would like to know if money could be found in other areas of the budget to allow Huffman School to remain open. Would fundraising be an option in raising additional funds to operate the school. There was discussion by the committee and it was felt that these questions would be addressed in the School Valuation Framework.

Angela Mainville wanted to know what the classes would look like if the school remained open, based on the 2012 projected enrolment. It was noted that there would be split grades as the Ministry has a cap of 20 students for primary class size.

Further Comments

Petrina Carlson, Mortgage Specialist for the Royal Bank, spoke about real estate value. Although parents like smaller schools, having a new school on the Robert Moore School property could in fact increase property values in that area which is positive for the community.

Kristin McCormick and Terry Higgins felt that better communication of the Accommodation Review process may be helpful. Do parents and community members understand the review? It was recommended that the Board find other ways to increase awareness about the accommodation review along with placing ads in the newspaper.

Schedule of Meetings

- 1st Public Consultation – December 3, 2007
- 2nd Public Consultation – January 15, 2008
- 3rd Public Consultation – February 12, 2008
- 4th Public Consultation – April 8, 2008

Accommodation Review Committee meeting – April 15, 2008 (public is invited to attend the committee meeting but only as an observer).

Dan Belluz thanked committee members, staff and community members for attending the public consultation.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.