

North Star remains the fall back option

Staff report: Assess including a stage and second gym in a new K-12 school at AHS

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District school board staff are recommending the high school site be used for a new K-12 school in Atikokan, and that the potential of including "an additional gymnasium/large flexible space that includes a stage" be assessed.

The key to the proposal remains finding a partner that will put North Star School, the current K-6 school, to good use. That building is in far better condition than the high school, and early indications are it would be suitable for a conversion to assisted living accommodations for seniors. The social services board is now seeking funding to do just that if the building does become available.

If a partner to take over North Star isn't found in the next year, or

the province declines to fund new construction at the high school site, board staff recommend that North Star School be expanded and renovated into a K-12 facility. Under this fall back plan, the board would maintain access to the Outers building, but dispose of the rest of the high school building.

Early indications are this would be a cheaper option. An architect's report prepared for the board suggests a new K-12 school at the high school site would cost about \$19.4 million, while expanding and renovating North Star School to make it suitable for K-12 would cost about \$12.2 million. (That includes the cost of adding a full-size, high school style, gym, while keeping the

existing North Star gym and stage complex.)

(There are cheaper options - at least in the short-term - at the high school site. The existing building could be re-purposed for K-12 needs with \$7 million to \$8.5 million in renovations. But that doesn't include the cost of upgrading mechanical and electrical systems. The board estimates they will need \$10 to \$15 million of work over the next five years.)

The board staff report responded directly to the concerns expressed by the accommodation review committee about the need for a second gym and stage. In addition to the call for the board to explore including such facilities in the new K-12 school, it

includes a detailed assessment of one of the suggestions made by review committee members.

The final staff report includes preliminary drawings for a new K-12 school at the AHS site that would preserve the existing shops (auto and wood), and the food and video lab, (as well as Grayson Hall and the Outers building). The remainder of the shop and resource centre wing would be converted to a small gym with a stage, and some additional shop and lab space. This is essentially the proposal made by Darryl Gannon to the review committee.

The architects estimate this project could be done for \$17.8 million.

The staff report, released June 2 at www.rdsb.com (look under Atikokan Accommodation Review) goes now to the school board for its consideration. It will meet here next Monday (7 pm, AHS) in committee-of-the-whole. It is expected to make a final decision on which plan to pursue by mid-September.