

Board makes it clear: Atikokan wants two gyms K-12 school proposal off to Ministry of Ed.

Jessica Smith

In opting to pursue consolidation of Atikokan's public schools into one K-12 school built on the AHS site, the Rainy River District School Board agreed to some fine-tuning of their proposal to the Ministry, at Wednesday evening's special meeting here.

The board will push for funding for a second gym and will postpone consideration of the North Star site as a secondary option.

The recommendation of the board is to amalgamate the elementary and high schools into one (mostly new) building at the current site of the high school. Grayson Hall and Outers building would be maintained as is, with the labs and tech rooms upgraded, but most of the current building razed and rebuilt.

While the board wants to consolidate to reduce operating costs (under pressure from the province), it will also push for another gymnasium, in addition to Grayson Hall, and in replacement of the old gym.

During the board's accommodation review process last school year, public input clearly showed a preference for a second gym, rather than an outdoor sports field, and sufficient space for both

physical education and theatre arts.

While the proposed recommendation sought funding to include "a gymnasium/large flexible space with a stage," vice-chair Mike Lewis asked that the words "flexible space" be removed.

"We want to make sure we send a message to the Ministry that we want an additional gym with a stage," he said, adding, that if the board leaves any ambiguity in the request, "I'm concerned that the Ministry will opt for flexible space rather than a gym."

The board approved the final wording for "an additional gym that includes a stage, given the community support for such space over an enhanced sports field."

Another amendment to the board's review was to pare down a recommendation regarding North Star to state that the board would "work within the 2017/18 school year to secure community partners" to use that facility as a community asset."

The original recommendation had included plans to pursue funding for a consolidated school at North Star (while maintaining access to Grayson hall and the Outers building at the AHS site) if the AHS site was not approved and/or community partners were not found to use the facility.

The changes were suggested by Fort Frances board member David Kircher, who echoed Lewis' sentiment that the community and board preference for the proposed consolidation at AHS be clearly and unambiguously expressed to the Ministry of Education. (Pursuing North Star as a secondary option will be tabled until a Ministry decision.)