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**Subject:**

**FW: Media Stories Jan. 25 Sustainability Study - Bath Community School**

## **Keep Bath school open, community tells DEC**



## **Mark Rickard | Bugle Observer**

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The nine presentations were unanimous. Bath parents, local politicians and community members told the Anglophone West District Education Council that the Bath Community School project needs to be completed as soon as possible.

DEC members listened to about two hours of presentations stressing why the Bath Community School project, an extensive renovation of the former Bath Middle School into a K to 8 facility, should be completed.

Renovations at Bath Middle School was halted last year after asbestos was discovered in the building. The province issued a tender to demolish the project, but Premier Blaine Higgs halted the demolition tender and asked the DEC to study the elementary schools in Florenceville-Bristol and Bath in a new sustainability study.

Jenna Harvey, a board member of the Step Ahead Early Learning Centre, which serves preschool, daycare and after school programs in the community, told the DEC their not-for-profit organization agreed to reduce their enrolment and take a financial hit while school renovations were underway. With renovations on hold, the future of the Bath Step Ahead program is now in doubt.

"Step Ahead has served hundreds of children and families, providing preschool, part-time and full-time daycare program ... we had to give up four of our classrooms for child care, preschool space and after-school space. We aren't just an independent business, we are part of the education system, under the umbrella of Education and Early Childhood Development," Harvey said. "At the other school we were licensed for 60 children and at our current location, we are only licensed for 41. That translates to our bottom line."

Jenna Harvey said the space crunch at the current Bath Elementary is apparent when the preschoolers have to share three bathroom stalls with infants who need diaper changes and middle school students trying to change into gymnasium clothing.

Margaret Johnson, PC candidate for Carleton-Victoria and a former Bath Middle School teacher, said a renovated Bath Community School "would fit seamlessly" with the province's green paper for education.

"We have the capacity to bring back industrial trade courses ... Bath Community School could be a pilot for all the green paper initiatives, if the project were completed. It is suggested a shiny new K-to 8 school that will encompass all the feeder schools in Carleton North, with the exception of Centreville, is the best solution. Students will be afforded opportunities that they would never have in a smaller school. I would suggest that bigger is not necessarily better," Johnson said. "In a community-based school everyone gets a chance."

Andrew Harvey, Carleton-Victoria MLA, said the Bath Community School has been an "emotional roller coaster" for parents and school staff. He said small schools can produce big results.

"It was not the size of the school that shaped who I am today, but it was the teachers, the district staff, the janitors, the reading, math, writing, social studies," he said. "They taught me respect for teachers, they taught me respect for students. And it has taught me many other things like a strong work ethic. Bath schools have provided a solid foundation for students for many generations."

Andrew Harvey said Bath residents had the vision of a newborn to grade eight facility at the Bath school, and he said everyone had the right intentions to complete the project.

"Unexpected circumstances during construction resulted in a change of work and costs ... We were on the right path to have this finished for last year ... Unexpected circumstances happen in renovations ... Are we going to punish the people of Bath that did the right thing? It's time to move forward on this issue."

Andrew Harvey urged DEC members to support completing the Bath Community School and to ask the government to move ahead quickly.

"You cannot turn the clock back now after five years of hard work and sacrifice ... A net \$2 million will finish the Bath Community School," the MLA said. "We can finish this school in six months. I am very confident that if the DEC takes a sober second look at this, I believe the current government will act on this fairly quickly."

Scott Oakes, a Parent School Support Committee member, said finishing the Bath Community School is the most reasonable action to take.

"We can and should be a host school for an updated second-language program ... Adoption of this program would allow us to capture students lost to mainstream French immersion," Oakes said. "The province desires to train more skilled workers and tradespeople ... The building next door has a full functioning shop just waiting to be utilized."

Oakes said Bath School could be a template for a New Brunswick K to 8 school that can help children thrive.

"I believe over the past year there has been far too much talk about the costs and unforeseen expenses to finish our school and a distressingly small amount of discussion regarding the tremendous cost of the length of completion of Bath Community School has had on our children ... We are asking you to not only consider the financial aspect, but the impact to our little community," Oakes said.

Sean Kilfoil, another PSSC member, pointed out Bath is in the second Policy 409 review in five years. He asked why staff are not allowed to express their opinions on the issue.

"I wanted to touch base on the school challenges that were identified at the first public meeting. These challenges are very real ... I ask you to put your children, grandchildren and neighbours' children in these situations. The staff and community accepted these challenges with the understanding this upgrade next door would be completed in one year."

Kilfoil urged the DEC to consider the investment made in Bath to date, and the cost of the project if abandoned.

"At the end of the day this community will have either a \$5-million parking lot or a \$7.5-million fully functional school," Kilfoil said.

Gerald Sullivan, former Bath school principal, said the renovation needs to be completed, regardless of what government is in power.

"The driving force behind the (2015) decision was to keep our children in our community. The DEC made this recommendation to the minister, the minister approved the recommendation ... That decision is the decision you should uphold. Nothing has changed," Sullivan said.

Mike Blanchard from the Bath Lions Club said club members understand the need for fiscal restraint, but disagree that the Bath Community School project should be abandoned.

"The Bath Lions club believes the DEC decision on April 2015 to recommend a refurbished K to 8 school was the right decision then and remains the right decision now... The Bath Lions Club share a common belief that community is what we make it. Schools in the community are the last pillars of support in rural areas. When a school is lost, the whole community loses," Blanchard said.

Mayor Troy Stone said the village went through Policy 409, the provincial policy to determine school sustainability, five years ago.

"If this is not completed we are left with a \$5-million parking lot with no tax revenue. I am worried about the future of recreation in the village. The youth will suffer, all the way from toddlers to the 19-year-olds," Stone told DEC members.

The DEC will announce its decision on the Northern Carleton school sustainability study on March 19 at Carleton North High School at 6:30 p.m.