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# Bath: complete school project; Florenceville-Bristol: build new school

## Recommendations to District Education Council call for K-to-8 schools in both communities

By Jim Dumville

More than 100 people filled the Bath Elementary School on Saturday morning, Jan 25, to drive home a message. They want the Anglophone West District Education Council to recommend finishing the job already started in their village.

The elementary school, which was officially closed four years ago, currently serves as the Bath Community School for students in kindergarten to Grade 8 to allow completion of the stalled upgrade of the former Bath Middle School next door.

The meeting in Bath was the first of two on the day as DEC members undertake sustainability studies of four northern Carleton Schools. Members moved on to Bristol Elementary School Saturday afternoon to hold a similar public session. The previous Saturday, DEC held public meetings at Florenceville Middle and Florenceville Elementary schools.

Unlike Bath, the message delivered at the three Florenceville-Bristol schools urged DEC members to recommend closure of all three schools in their town in favour of a new K-to-Grade 8 school built in the community.

The divide between public interests in Bath and Florenceville-Bristol appeared narrow as presenters at all four schools promoted the construction of a new school primarily to replace the Florenceville-Bristol schools. Most believed the future of the Bath school should be treated separately by DEC members.

In Bath, nine presentations delivered a passionate plea to move forward with the completion of the plan DEC recommended in 2015, which was put into action for the 2015-16 school year. That year saw the closure of the elementary school and all students, from kindergarten to Grade 8, moved next door to the newly named Bath Community School.

In 2017, the provincial cabinet approved a ma-

ior capital project to upgrade the Bath Community School to meet the needs of its students. That project was placed on hold by the new Progressive Conservative government last year.

Carleton-Victoria Liberal MLA Andrew Harvey spoke at both the Bath and Bristol meetings, calling it an "emotional" day, noting it was "the last day to convince DEC to do the right thing."

Like other Bath presenters, Harvey noted the millions of dollars already invested in the retrofit of the old Bath Middle School to prepare to meet its new needs as the K-to-8 Bath Community School.

"This project is 75 percent complete," Harvey said, noting \$4.1 million was spent before the project was halted by the current government.

He said the discovery of asbestos pushed the costs of the original estimate higher, but also noted demolishing the school will also have to include the cost of asbestos removal.

"One-third of the asbestos is already removed and paid for," he reminded DEC, "Why not remove the rest?"

Harvey said it would require \$2 million to complete the project in Bath.

"It's a wise financial investment to keep the school," said Harvey.

Harvey's focus on the funds already invested in the Bath project echoed those of many other speakers on the day.

Sean Kilfoil, who along with Scott Oakes, delivered a presentation on behalf of the Bath PSSC, Parent School Support Committee, cited two options for the future of the school site. He said the province must choose between a "\$5 million parking lot or a \$7.5 million school."

Oakes touched on costs of the renovation or demolition of the schools but emphasized that should not be the primary question.

"There's too much emphasis on cost," he said, "but not to the cost of delays to our students."

Oakes said students, parents and staff believed in 2015 that the future of their schools had been resolved, but they now find themselves facing the second school sustainability study in five years.

Margaret Johnson, who ran as the PC candidate and narrowly lost to Harvey in last fall's election, also addressed DEC members in Bath.

The former teacher said she was not there as a candidate but as a concerned citizen.

"I'm truly humbled by the presentations here today," Johnson said.

She said the facts presented demonstrated "how seamlessly" the planned retrofit in Bath could roll into the provincial government's recently released Green Paper on education.

Bath Mayor Troy Stone expressed frustration to be back making the same arguments that were successful in 2015.

He said the loss of the school would have a devastating impact on the village, including putting the community's recreation programs and facilities at risk.

In speaking to the River Valley Sun following his presentation, Stone said the entire community was blindsided by the government's decision to cancel the ongoing school retrofit and issue a tender, later rescinded, to demolish the building.

Stone, like other presenters in Bath, also stressed the importance of the Step Ahead early learning program housed in the Bath Community School. The mayor said the highly acclaimed program is being put at risk.

Jenna Harvey and Somer Drost made a presentation on behalf of the Step Ahead program, outlining the services it offers to children and families in the region. They also explained the major challenges the program faced over the past five years as it waited for the retrofit at the planned Bath Community School to be completed.

Other speakers in Bath

included Mike Blanchard on behalf of the Bath Lions Club, retired teacher and principal Gerald Sullivan, parent and former student Rachel Smith and Charles McNair, Bath's deputy mayor who explained he was speaking as a concerned citizen.

Charles McNair delivered his presentation at all four sustainability study meetings, calling for a new K-to-8 school to be built along the old Trans Canada Highway in Florenceville-Bristol.

Although serving as Bath's deputy mayor, McNair said he was addressing DEC as a concerned citizen, not as a member of the Bath council. He emphasized at the Bath and Bristol meetings his call for a new K-to-8 school doesn't affect his views on the Bath project. He believes the DEC's best recommendation would be to support the completion of the retrofit to the Bath Community School and build a new school to serve Florenceville-Bristol.

At Bristol Elementary School Saturday afternoon, Harvey outlined his vision for the Florenceville-Bristol schools, noting it will have to be addressed on a different timeline than the Bath situation.

"The timing is really important on these," he said. "The Bath project has to be completed immediately. Building a new school is a long process, about five or six years."

He later told the River Valley Sun he supports completing the Bath retrofit without going through the provincial government's capital budget process. He noted the Bath project already went through the process in 2015.

Harvey said a new K-to-Grade 8 school will have to go through the capital budget process. Under this timeline, he explained, the Bath situation will be addressed immediately and the Florenceville-Bristol issue a few years down the road.

As for the location of a planned new school, Harvey said he has no opin-



Bath Community School is sitting idle because of a delayed upgrade. (Jim Dumville photo)

ion, other than it should be within the town boundaries.

Florenceville-Bristol CAO Sarah Pacey was on hand in Bristol, as she was at the previous Saturday's meeting, to outline the town's proposal of a new school built near Carleton North High School.

Currently, Pacey said, the student populations are 224 at Florenceville Elementary School, 97 at Bristol Elementary School and 207 at Florenceville Middle School for a total of 528. She added the population of the Meduxnekeag Consolidated School in Woodstock, one of two new schools in that community, is approximately 620, making a similarly designed K-to-8 in Florenceville-Bristol a viable option.

Pacey said the town undertook a detailed study of the education and social needs of the community and came to the conclusion the creation of a "learning campus" in the area surrounding the current Carleton North High School was the preferred option.

She said that plan offered better educational options for the children, and economic benefits to the town. Pacey said the town has also studied potential uses for the vacated schools, including a possible medical clinic, art and performance centre or a business co-operative.

McNair's proposal to

replace the three schools with one differs from the town's only on the issue of location. As he repeated at all four meetings, he doesn't believe the location of any of the existing schools is a viable site for the new schools.

McNair said he envisions three K-to-8 schools in northern Carleton, including the existing school in Centreville, the refurbished school in Bath and the new school in Florenceville-Bristol. He proposed the construction of a new school on Route 130, the old Trans Canada Highway, on land near the Florenceville Motor Inn.

McTimony said members of DEC will take all the presentations under advisement and will deliver its recommendations at a public meeting at Carleton North High School on Thursday, March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

He said DEC will recommend one of three options. They can maintain the status quo; recommend upgrades to one or more of the existing schools; or recommend closure of schools and construction of a new K-to-8. He said those recommendations would not include the location of a new school, saying that would be in the hands of the provincial government.

McTimony also pointed out the DEC could recommend the closure of some, but not all, of the existing schools.

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