

Grand Erie District School Board**Committee of the Whole Meeting****Delegation Submission re: South East Norfolk Elementary – Pupil Accommodation Review****Meeting Date: Monday, September 26, 2016**

My name is Gordon Malo and I am the parent of children enrolled in Grades 1, 3 and 5 at West Lynn Public School.

I had the opportunity to attend the ARC Meetings held as part of the Pupil Accommodation Review for the South East Norfolk Elementary region, as well as present a delegation to the ARC Committee. I was extremely impressed with the respectful and professional manner in which the meetings were conducted. I commend Superintendent Wayne Baker for his excellent facilitation and Mr. Jamie Gunn for answering all questions in a full and transparent fashion while also researching and distributing additional information requested by parents and community members. I thank Trustee Rita Collver and Trustee John Harris who sat on the ARC Committee and actively listened to the questions, concerns and input of community members while clearly demonstrating an open-minded approach to ensuring the best solution was discovered to serve the interests of our children. Finally, I was very pleased with the courteous and constructive participation of parents and community members.

With declining enrolment rates in our region it is unfortunate, but clearly necessary, to close a school to achieve a targeted school utilization rate of 85%. To realize this goal senior management's original ARC recommendation was to close West Lynn Public School. The rationale for this recommendation was clearly presented and appeared to make sense given the prevailing circumstances.

Many community members asked if a better solution may be found by instead keeping West Lynn Public School open and closing Elgin Avenue Public School. Mr. Jamie Gunn was of great assistance in presenting this scenario, however it was seen that this option required an expansion of the West Lynn Public School, and that such an expansion was not possible given the school property's limited size.

Fortunately, during the ARC process the owners of a property immediately adjacent to West Lynn indicated that they were open to selling their property at its fair market value to accommodate a school expansion. This new information allowed for the consideration of a West Lynn expansion and it is this option, listed as Option #7 of the Report of the South East Norfolk Elementary ARC and now Senior Administration's recommendation, which I strongly believe should be supported.

The ARC Report lists a total of seven options. Option #7, "Keep West Lynn open and, instead, close Elgin", is on balance the most convincing opportunity to ensure our students and our communities have the best facilities to suit their needs for many years ahead. The primary reasons are as follows:

1) Enhanced Utilization Rates

Expanding West Lynn results in an immediate utilization rate of 89.2% and a projected 10-year utilization rate of 90.4%. These figures represent some of the highest immediate and long-term projected utilization rates of all the options and provides a cushion in case actual utilization rates are lower than anticipated.

In particular, it is significantly improved from the option to expand Elgin Public School, which had a 10-year utilization rate of 85.8%, or barely over the 85% target.

2) Keeping Students In Their Community School

Building strong communities requires children to attend school in their community.

The West Lynn opportunity results in no changes to English programming school boundaries outside of Simcoe. Within Simcoe, all Simcoe children will continue to attend a Simcoe school.

For French Immersion students, their situation will be improved by being able to attend either Walsh Public School or Lakewood Elementary School, significantly reducing transportation times for many students and allowing them to attend school in, or closer to, their home community.

3) French Immersion Expansion

Option #7 sees French Immersion fully implemented at both Walsh Public School and Lakewood Elementary School. This would likely entice additional families in the east section of the zone to consider French Immersion. Further, it has been announced that St. Joseph's Catholic School in Simcoe will now be offering French Immersion. For those families considering French Immersion who have a choice between school boards, having French Immersion at Lakewood Elementary will provide a strong public school option for these families, thereby supporting future public school utilization rates.

4) Transition

With an isolated school addition and far more modest improvements to its existing structure, a West Lynn expansion will offer students a more streamlined and less disruptive transition to the new school footprint. This compares to a far more dramatic relocation processes which would have been required by rebuilding Elgin Public School.

5) Accessibility & Capital Cost

West Lynn is currently a fully accessible school, a huge benefit for designing an expanded footprint which will fulfill the needs of all students. Further, per Mr. Jamie Gunn, renewal costs would be significantly less at West Lynn compared to the original Elgin plan.

6) Property Re-Purposing Opportunities

The Elgin Avenue Public School property has much to offer the community. I understand that Norfolk General Hospital and Nursing Home has already expressed an interest in the property. Alternatively, the land may be an attractive investment to another public or private healthcare institutions looking to supplement the health care offerings in this area. Regardless of the specific direction, re-purposing of the Elgin Avenue property should provide enhanced revenue-generating possibilities to the Board.

Without knowing that West Lynn's neighbouring property was available for purchase the opportunity to expand the school could not be fully considered at the beginning of the Pupil Accommodation Review. I thank the Renton family for voicing their openness to selling their property, thereby making an expanded West Lynn a possibility. I was recently in contact with the Renton family and can confirm that they continue to own the property and that their position regarding selling it to the Board has not changed.

For these reasons I am speaking in favour of Option #7. I thank the ARC Committee for their consideration of this alternative, and for the endorsement of this option by the Board's Senior Administration.

I thank the Board for the opportunity to address you today and for your careful consideration of all alternatives. Closing a school is never a pleasant experience and there will be disappointment and challenges regardless of the path chosen. That said, it was the task of all invested parties to ensure that through the ARC process the best opportunity was identified which addresses the realities of our diminishing enrollment rates, while also providing our community with the best school facilities through which to educate our children. Option #7, expanding West Lynn Public School, is that opportunity.

Thank you,

Gordon Malo