

Mayor, residents fear review will result in closure

Future of Walkerton District in jeopardy?

BY CHRISTINE BRANDT

WHT Reporter

Community members interested in learning more about the fate of Walkerton's three public schools left a meeting last week with a task – brainstorm ideas on how to keep the high school open and retain its student population.

About 200 people turned out for the Jan. 29 meeting, which was hosted by the local Accommodation Review Committee (ARC). Many in the audience were hoping to hear ideas and opinions from ARC members, but chair Dan Wong said that wasn't the purpose of the meeting.

He noted the Walkerton ARC specifically requested permission from the Bluewater District School Board to gather input from the public during the review process, when the board usually takes into account only recommendations made by the ARC.

"We will be looking outside the box and examining all blue sky opportunities," Wong said in response to a question on whether the ARC is also brainstorming ideas. "We're going to be open and transparent but we're here to listen to your ideas."

The ARC didn't comment on recent speculation that the board may opt to close Walkerton District Secondary School and bus its students to Hanover, Chesley or Kincardine, while merging the populations of Brant Central and Walkerton Public Schools. Another idea would see a new school built in Walkerton for students in kindergarten to Grade 12, but the ARC has yet to make a decision about which of these suggestions, if any, it will recommend to the board.

During the meeting, Wong and Bluewater's South Central area superintendent Lori Wilder fielded most of the audience's questions. Many in the crowd were unaware of the Ministry of Education "triggers", or



With a projected capacity rate of 35 per cent in five years, many local officials and residents are worried that the Bluewater District School Board have already decided to close WDSS.

guidelines, that initiated the accommodation review, and several more asked about the various ideas, such as the K to Grade 12 school, already presented to the ARC.

Wong promised to share some of the community's feedback forms with the public at the next accommodation review meeting at the end of February.

"We all have children in the system so we have a vested interest in this," said Wong. "We are available 24/7, so feel free to contact us or approach us on the street or in the supermarket. We'd be happy to answer any questions you might have or clarify the process."

Most questions centered around WDSS, which is operating at 48 per cent capacity this year. By 2013, projected enrolment will see the 57-year-old school

at 35 per cent capacity. Ministry guidelines say the building will be cost-prohibitive to repair by 2011-12, at which time funding would be made available to construct a new school, based on its population at that time.

In a brief presentation on behalf of the Brockton Economic Development Committee, Brockton Mayor Charlie Bagnato spoke about the harmful impact that would result if Walkerton lost its public high school. "Plans are being finalized for a new medical clinic in Walkerton," Bagnato said. "To date 12 people have been hired for the Family Health Team with one more position to be filled. The lack of a public secondary school would badly hamper any chance for success in further recruitment to the team."

See Review, page 2

Mayor calls for 'open' public meeting Feb. 13 at Community Centre

Brockton's Medical Clinic beginning to take shape

BY LINDSEY KUGLIN

WHT Reporter

Patient and staff displacement will be minimal during the demolition of the former nurses' residence to make way for the Brockton and Area

Medical Clinic, according to South Bruce Grey Health Centre CEO Paul Davies.

One birthing unit will be destroyed, but will be moved to another room within the birthing centre, and won't reduce the number of available units. The physicians' staff room is also located in the

area set to be demolished, but they will be accommodated elsewhere.

Preliminary plans for the new clinic, which will house the Brockton and Area Family Health Team, and nine doctors' offices, were revealed at a press conference, Thursday.

"What is being presented is a conceptual drawing, not a final plan," Davies said.

The drawings show three floors, approximately 4,300 square feet each, to be built at the site of the former nurses' residence on the east side of the hospital.

Utilities, such as water and electricity will be cut off to that part of the hospital by mid-March to prepare for the demolition.

The entrance to the hospital will also be improved, with only one main door, that will lead to entrances for the Family Health Team, the hospital, and to hospital staff areas.

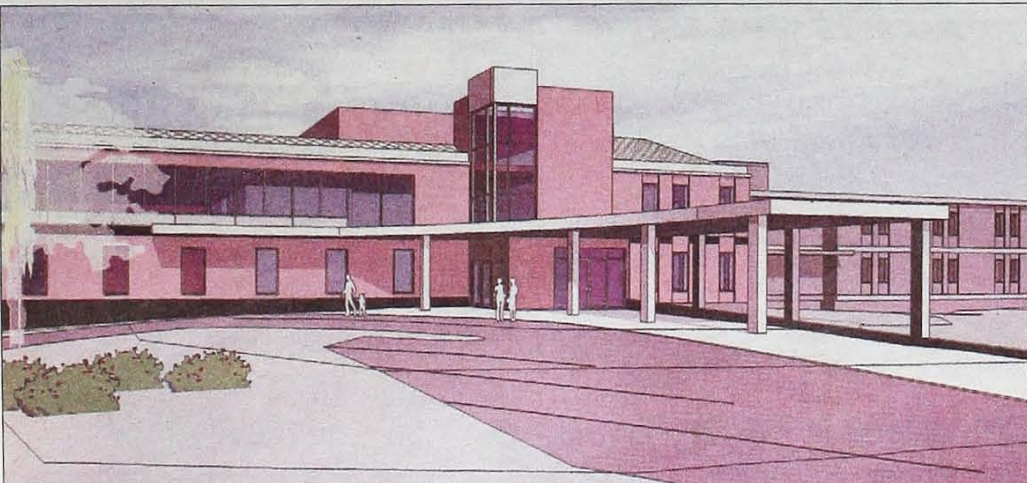
Currently, there are separate outdoor entrances to each section, with inadequate signage, making it confusing for people unfamiliar with the hospital, Davies says.

Also, the stairs leading to the entrances will be eliminated by incorporating a grade.

A walkway leading to the entrance will be covered, with a drive-up drop-off point, so patients' exposure to the elements will be minimized.

The timeline for the project is undetermined as of yet, however, Davies says similar projects he's been involved in usually take about a year.

See Plans, page 3



Preliminary plans for the Brockton and Area Medical Clinic were revealed on Thursday. The demolition of the old nurses' station, where the clinic is to be built, will begin in April. Officials expect the construction will be completed in the summer of 2009.