

Township protests Castleton Public School closure proposal

By Bob Owen
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Cramahe Township Council had its say on February 6 regarding the proposals being made by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board to close two Cramahe Township schools.

Mayor Marc Coombs, who first found out about the proposals from a parent at one of the schools considered for closure, introduced the motion.

The Cramahe Township motion follows:

"The Council of the Municipality of the Township of Cramahe understands that the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board recently held a 'Capital Plan Consultation Meeting' to discuss the planned closure of two of the three elementary schools in our Township.

"This is, of course, of great concern to us. Just some of the issues we would like to raise with

the Board are:

"The lack of the involvement of the Municipality by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board in preparing their Capital Plan

"The total lack of notification of the Municipality by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board of their Capital Plan and of their "Consultation Meeting" of January 31.

"The lack of proper time for both residents and the Municipality to prepare proper reports as requested by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board.

"In fact, the date that meeting notifications were first placed by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board in the Northumberland News (January 19) and the date that responses were originally requested by (February 5) was between the time that our two council meetings were held, January 16 and February 6.

"It would seem that for a

proper response to your Capital Plan and suggested alternate proposals as you suggest you want, a much longer timeframe should be provided.

"The closure of these schools would have a devastating long-term effect on the economic well-being of our community. Young families wouldn't move into Castleton if their children had to be bussed for up to one hour to another community.

"The resulting loss of tax base would put a heavy burden on the existing residents in the form of higher taxes.

"This plan would seem to contradict the Provincial Government's "Ontario Rural Plan" which states that "The role of the school in a rural community is even larger than providing essential education. The heart of the community is often the local school — the place where people get together to take courses, take part in community activities and stay active and

involved. In some rural areas the school is the only public institution. Schools help shape community identity and contribute to a high quality of life. The presence of a local school can attract young families to live, work and raise their children in that community.

"Your government knows that rural schools are facing special challenges, including class sizes, staffing, programming and crumbling schools. We are committed to meeting those challenges successfully. We are investing in rural schools, making sure more doors stay open for community needs.

"Our schools are the social centres for their respective communities, both are active and vibrant and are integral to our municipality.

"We see our community as growing in the future and would be happy to share our plans with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District

School Board. We see our community as an 'active-living' community and attracting people and families of all ages, not just those retiring, therefore feel your statistics are incorrect."

MOTION ON THE MOVE

Copies of the motion which passed unanimously were sent to Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board trustees, Gord Gilchrist and Cyndi Dickson, MPP Rinaldi and to the other municipalities in Northumberland looking for their support in the form of a motion.

As an addendum the mayor proposed that Cramahe Township staff prepare a report on the economic impact of the school closings and forward that to the school board.

DEPUTY MAYOR ALREADY AT WORK

Deputy-Mayor Jim Williams had already spoken to Northumberland-Quinte West MPP Lou Rinaldi and the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, John Gerretsen.

The deputy mayor wanted to know the value the government puts on communities.

Mr. Williams stated flat out that the board doesn't think about how closing Castleton Public School will destroy the community.

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in attendance at the school.

Parent Michelle White concurred with Mrs. Galt's sentiment.

Lisa Fraser has been told different stories about when the proposals go before the board's trustees for ratification.

Trustee Cyndi Dickson asserted that it was to come forward on February 22. Board spokesman Greg Kidd assured her that it would be in the spring.

She's also aware of many breeches in communication with the community that are covered by board policy.

Administrative issues were alluded to by several parents that related to personality problems and communication.

It was even suggested that declining enrollments in the school were related to "internal issues".

The Parents Committee at the school made plans to bring in professional soprano and

music teacher Heather Stubbs for choir work. It was never followed through by the school.

One parent offered that at least 20 children within the Castleton catchment area attend school elsewhere.

Another suggested that the board look at other ways to use the school to meet the education needs in a knowledge-based economy.

Ms. Fraser suggested that a delegation attend the board meeting in Peterborough when the Ten-Year Capital Plan is brought to the trustees.

Ms. Fraser has been looking at adjustments that could be made to school boundaries and consolidation ideas that would keep the Castleton school open.

With some boundary adjustments the school could house 300 students.

She reiterated some of the concerns already raised about lengthy bus rides, and

closing one prohibitive to repair school to put kids in another one with the same designation.

"Let's build a new school here," she enthused.

Michelle White again brought up a proposal that is gaining momentum in the township - to close South Cramahe and bus the South Cramahe students who live north of Highway 401 to Castleton. Those living south of Highway 401 would attend Colborne Public School.

Her proposal would keep the children in the township and incur less busing.

If a new school were to be built in Castleton and in Brighton, the board could close all four prohibitive to repair schools in this part of Northumberland.

In any event, Mrs. White wonders where the board has spent its money in the past 30 years when it has been neglecting Castleton.