

## Local News

## South Cramahe school appeal heard;

*Continued from page 1*

When the committee could not come to consensus on a new location, Ms. Summersides presented the information she had collected with the committee and the board made its June, 2008 decision to place the new school in Castleton.

In July, the parents appealed and their concerns were heard Nov. 13.

Ms. Wilson and Ontario Education Officer Len Godin heard from the committee first.

She reminded the group she does not have the power to overturn the board's June decision. She can look at whether the board's school closure policies were followed and look at its procedures to ascertain if they are transparent and comply with the province's requirements.

Committee member Robin Rath was the first to speak from the committee. She felt the process had been steered in a specific direction from the beginning. Committee members had to agree to close their schools before any information regarding the replacement school was discussed. She didn't think that was part of the board policy.

Mrs. Rath questioned the target dates for the new school, stating that the board's 10-year capital plan determined construction of a new school should begin in 2011.

In March, 2008 the committee was told the start date was non-negotiable. Construction on the new school must begin this fall.

Ms. Wilson reminded Mrs. Rath and Cramahe Mayor Marc Coombs that she was looking at the process of the board administrative procedures. It was within the board's mandate to decide what schools it wanted to close.

Mayor Coombs stated his opinion that the committee did not have much input into the closings which were the starting point of the procedure.

Ms. Wilson responded with a question of her own, "Was the committee aware of the Ministry of Education's examination of schools and the prohibitive to repair status?"

The mayor, who sat on the committee, admitted it was.

Michelle White agreed and listed the history of the process prior to the decision to close the two schools at the committee's second meeting last February.

Rusty Hick replaced Ms. Summersides upon her retirement in August. He noted that the decision to close the schools was made by the board. The committee made the recommendation but the board made the decision.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Ms. Wilson asked the group once more to consider if board policies had been breached.

Mrs. White again supported the process, stating her opinion that the board had listened to the voices of the community.

Mayor Coombs disagreed adding that he thought the committee did not want to close the schools. When the alternative was to send the children to Brighton the board was petitioned by the township to put a new school in Cramahe. There was an

awareness that the current school in Castleton needed more repair. That wasn't as apparent at South Cramahe.

In the committee it was one group against the other, in the mayor's opinion. The members couldn't decide and the board made the decision. Some weren't happy he noted.

In an attempt to clarify public understanding of his position, the mayor admitted he gave his personal opinion when asked but did not speak to and board member or trustee in order to influence them.

Bringing the conversation back to the school site selection, Mrs. Rath expressed her concern that issues regarding the Greenfield site had not been considered.

Fellow committee member Debbie Grouchy confirmed the statement and spoke of an urgent deadline for selection of the new school site, despite the fact that the \$4.8-million provincial grant appears to be available indefinitely.

Ms. Wilson's request for clarification was met by Mr. Hick.

The superintendent explained there were possible Ontario Municipal Board objections and zoning questions. The board was told by Mayor Coombs the process to resolve these concerns would be lengthy.

Later in the discussion Mr. Hick explained there was a pool of money available in the province to replace prohibitive to repair schools. Those who got their requests in earlier had a better chance of getting grant money.

Mrs. White refuted the claim that Greenfield sites were not given adequate consideration.

They were looked at in the April meeting of the committee and didn't meet the criteria set by the committee without influence by Ms. Summersides.

When a new site was identified three to four weeks after the deadline for consideration, it was considered and didn't meet committee requirements.

Having listened to the conversation, Ms. Wilson admitted she wasn't hearing much about breach of board policies. Rather, she was hearing disagreement about the location of the proposed new school. The board had met the criteria for moving forward she said; there were declining enrollments and the two schools had been declared prohibitive to repair by the province.

She commented on the information read on the subject and how people in the township had wanted a rural school. She thought the inevitable question would be about consolidation and a new building.

She wondered if the committee had agreed to this.

Ann McMurray agreed it had, but added the choice of location had caused upset.

Ms. Wilson will take three weeks to consider the information she and Mr. Godin have collected and send her report to the provincial minister of education. From there, it will be sent to the Kawartha Pine Ridge public school board and released to the public.

Mr. Hick said after the meeting nothing will be done by the board until it has received the report.

CHRONICLE — Thursday, November 27, 2008 — 11

no answers