

Regional centre concerns Catholics

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Special to The IFP

The best way to carry the torch of Catholicism is not to shrink away from the world at large, says a senior Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) official, but to be an active participant in it while remaining true to core principles and faith.

Superintendent Larry Clifford made that comment at last week's board meeting where some trustees expressed concern that moving into a proposed joint Halton Regional Campus might conflict with, and perhaps even erode, the board's autonomy, identity, Catholicity and more.

"We need to be out there," said Clifford. Superintendent Rick MacDonald agreed, saying that the downfall of Catholic education won't be triggered by partnering up with others.

In a nutshell, the government office "super-centre" concept is one which involves the creation of a major, 540,000 square foot multi-use campus on the Bronte Road property currently occupied by Halton Regional headquarters as well as adjacent land that is up for sale. If it comes to pass, the site would be a central location that would include four distinct areas of office space for the Region, Halton Regional Police, HCDSB and the Halton District School Board, housing about 1,900 staff.

It's estimated that the campus would cost approximately \$127 million, but would result in an overall savings of more than \$20 million for taxpayers—as opposed to how much it would cost if each of the four partners pursued individual buildings.

The site would also include an outdoor community square and a multi-services facility linked to the office space that would house amenities to be shared by the four partners, such as a joint board/council chambers, cafeteria, daycare service, support services or perhaps even a Tim Hortons.

Halton Hills Trustee Irene McCauley said yesterday (Thursday) that she has concerns about being part of the joint campus, one of them being the amount of provincial funding that will be available for the facility.

"We would have to know exactly how much money would be coming from the province to help pay for it," said McCauley.

"We also want to make sure our Catholic identity is prominent. We just want to make sure that when people come to the facility they know that we are the Catholic board," McCauley said.

She said the board is continuing to work with all the stakeholders involved in the joint facility, and is hoping all the issues can be resolved.

Burlington Trustee Bob Van de Vrande said a report on the impacts of the campus on the Board—gleaned from a variety of sources including Bishop Anthony Tonnos—highlighted only vague concerns, not specifics and what needs to be done to safeguard the board.

Education director Lou Piovesan disagreed with Van de Vrande's interpretation that the report was incomplete and remained adamant that the board will never compromise its principles.

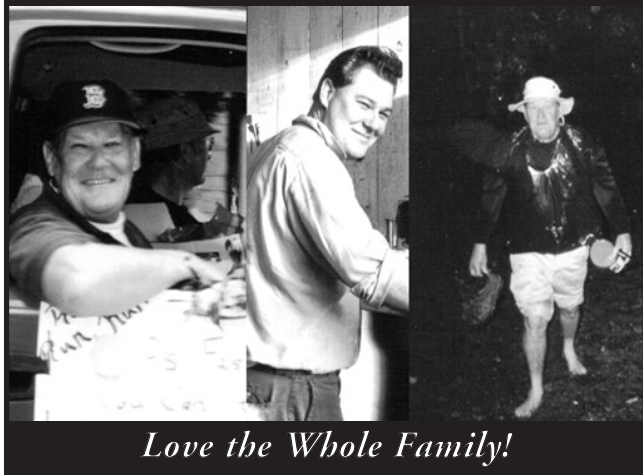
Earlier in the evening, Milton trustee Rev. David Wilhelm said 20 years ago he would have been less concerned about such a partnership but, given today's climate in which institutions of Catholicism are under increased pressure, he remains apprehensive. The report, he added, did nothing to allay those fears.

Oakville trustee Alice Anne LeMay said that while she doesn't see as many "bogeymen" as other trustees, more focus needs to be placed on exactly "who we are" in future reports.

Superintendent of Facility Management Services Giacomo Corbacio assured trustees that all four partners must agree on everything unanimously before the project becomes a reality.

—With files from Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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