

Proposed school boundaries get rough reception

By Rebecca Ring

The Upper Grand District School Board hosted a public

open house at Rockwood Centennial Public School on January 24 to answer ques-

tions and get feedback on the proposed school boundary review. About 100 people

attended including representatives from the school board Dennis Cuomo, Bonnie Evans, Heather Imm, and Superintendent Rose Mary Fyfe. Trustees present were Linda Bussetill, Lynn Topping and Ralph Edwards.

Overcrowding is already a problem at Rockwood Centennial, with enrolment at 118% capacity, while Eramosa Public School is under capacity at 74%. If all remains as is, Rockwood is forecasted to hit 162% in ten years, and Eramosa will reach 85% capacity.

All agreed a solution is necessary, but most parents present disagreed with the board's proposals. These include sending Rockwood students to Eramosa, and busing students into Guelph and Centre Wellington. Details are available from the school board and at www.ugdsb.on.ca.

Cuomo says the open house is a great opportunity for the public to ask questions in an informal setting, adding "It allows for a better conversation, one to one. Many would not ask questions in a large group meeting." The staff found the sessions to be informative.

No school funds

Cuomo says that funds do not allow for building a second smaller school in Rockwood, but it may be possible to add more classrooms, depending on boundary changes. The number of kids outside of Rockwood school boundaries reduces the size, as will the building of a Catholic school, which is indicated in

that board's long-term plan. "We don't want to overbuild now," he says.

School Board Superintendent Rose Mary Fyfe says, "This is truly an information evening with an opportunity to share information and look at options. We welcome comments and questions."

Deb Drake, a parent of Rockwood Centennial children, says, "Lots of parents are irate. Nobody wants to go to Guelph. We don't want to see the community split up and that is what could happen. We need to be heard. Let trustees know how you feel because they will make the decisions."

Marty Durksen, co-chair of the Rockwood Centennial Parent Student School Council, says, "One option not on the list is number eight, in which the boundaries stay the same and we build on to the school. The board does not want schools as big as 800 students, so split it."

Durksen suggests separating administration for JK to six and grades seven and eight, sharing facilities such as two gyms, a bigger library and more washrooms. He says the education portion from development fees should be spent where the population is growing, "It needs to come back to the people. The Province named the area as a 'Place to Grow' so funds should also come from them to support the infrastructure."

Doug Breen was there as a parent and councillor. He says it is imperative that kids are not bussed to Guelph because that will

erode the boundary, "The city of Guelph's influence will move into the municipality, leading to annexation and the community erodes."

Mayor Chris White, also there as parent and councillor says, "The community suffers when schools are split. Everton, Eden Mills and Rockwood are all one community." White recognizes the problem but wants students to stay in Guelph/Eramosa. Moving more kids into Eramosa School helps to keep the rural school alive and takes pressure off of Rockwood School, he says, adding that it was nice to have the open house and work together with the school board.

Rockwood School's parent council put their position in writing, they're committed to working with the Board to find solutions but "We do not feel that the boundary review is a satisfactory solution." They called it a band-aid solution and want a reinstatement of a full accommodation review. The population will grow mostly within the Rockwood boundary area so overcrowding will continue despite boundary changes, they maintain.

The next step is a business operations meeting on March 20 where school board staff will present the second report. Delegations are invited to speak. Contact the school board to register as a delegation. A board meeting on March 27 will decide whether a decision will be made on accepting the second report. Both meetings are at 7 PM.

The ROCKWOOD Miller



OPEN DISCUSSIONS: The Upper Grand District School Board held an Open House January 24 for the public to discuss the proposed boundary reviews for Rockwood Centennial and Eramosa Public Schools. Planner Dennis Cuomo explains the seven different options to parents Laura Millson of Eramosa and Stephen Putman of Eden Mills. Millson says Eramosa welcomes Rockwood students and Putman says he wants the community to stay together in Rockwood. - Rebecca Ring Photo

Guelph/ Eramosa

Council Chips by Rebecca Ring

Council consents to Halton's 211-311 program

Guelph/Eramosa Council consented to Halton Region implementing its 211/311 phone services for two shared exchanges, affecting 2,887 Guelph/Eramosa households. Halton Region is implementing these two phone services through Bell Canada. Kate Johnston, Manager of Customer Service Improvement Projects for Halton Region, explained the services and implications.

211 callers will be able to access information on and referral to non-emergency social, health and government services in their community. 311 callers will access non-emergency municipal services. In the short term, Halton will redirect Guelph/Eramosa callers from shared exchanges to local services at no cost.

All council members said the overlap is uncertain and confusing, suggesting that callers from Guelph/Eramosa will get inaccurate information on services. Despite this, all agreed to test it out and decide where to go with it in the future. Halton Region will begin launching it in April.

Routine financial agreements set up for 2007

Council agreed to authorize temporary borrowing "from time to time" to meet expenses. They also provided for an interim tax levy and for payment of taxes by instalment. The interim taxes on a property are based on 50% of the 2006 amount. The actual tax levy will be determined in this year's budget.

Donation to Kiwanis Music Festival doubled

Guelph/Eramosa usually donates \$100 to the Kiwanis Music Festival of Guelph each year. The funds go to two \$50 scholarships awarded to participants who reside in Guelph/Eramosa.

John Scott made a motion to increase the amount to a total of \$200, saying, "This youth festival is a tremendous opportunity. One hundred dollars is not enough." Roger Knapp asked if any other donation commitments would be affected by an increase. Mayor Chris White suggested that \$200 would not have a dramatic effect and "no one else will be denied because of this."

Council agreed to donate two \$100 scholarships to two new winners in the festival who are residents of Guelph/Eramosa.

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