

School board feeling pressure following controversial report

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

The wheels are turning and tongues are wagging following proposals to build, renovate or close dozens of Halton public schools.

A capital strategic plan unveiled Wednesday recommended the Halton District School Board spend \$409 million over 20 years to build and renovate schools.

The C.N. Watson consultants plan proposes building 33 new elementary schools and eight new secondary schools in two decades.

But it also recommends closing 12 elementary schools and four high schools.

E.C. Drury High School is recommended for closure in 2013, but construction of two new Milton high schools is proposed before then.

Currently, E.C. Drury students share shops, an auditorium cafeteria and playing fields with the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf students.

"It's very difficult for us," noted E.C. Drury High School council chair Liz Munro. "We need a school of our own with a vocational school attached."

One surprise was a recommendation to close Central High School. Burlington's oldest high school would be converted to house junior

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DEBBIE DOWNS

kindergarten to grade 8 students and an adult education centre. Nearby Central School, the current elementary school, would be closed.

"We were not expecting that at all," said Debbie Downs, a Central High School council member. "It clearly doesn't make any sense to any of us."

She feels Central High School should continue housing high-school students and grades 7 and 8s, which it has done for 10 years. Consultants have recommended that Aldershot High School assume this set-up.

"They're proposing having new schools built for kids who are currently bused, but then our kids will need to be bused," said Ms Downs.

Central High School students would have long rides to Aldershot or Nelson high schools, she noted.

"They're robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Her other concerns included combining adult and elementary students and preserving two historic schools.

"The fight has begun," said Ms Downs. "We don't want them to even consider this."

Both Oakville's Q.E. Park High School and Q.E. Park School were recommended for closure. Randy Lowe expressed concern the high school's closure was linked to construction of a new high school in northwest Oakville.

"It's a dangerous link to make suggesting to people in Glen Abbey that the way to get a new school is to get those schools closed," said Mr. Lowe, chair of Q.E. Park High School council.

He added the high school fully integrates grades 7 to OAC and there are renowned French Immersion programs at both QE Park schools.

"The C.N. Watson report doesn't address the issue of French Immersion," he noted. "Programming for kids is not addressed very well."

The proposed 2004 closing could discourage spending on the school and parents from enrolling their children, he added.

Burlington's General Brock High School is also recommended for closure, with its vocational school becoming part of Lord Elgin. It was recommended the General Brock building be used for board administration offices.

Elementary schools recommended for closure include Martin Street • see PARENTS on page 13

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