

Catholic board discusses proposed move to Region

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

A possible government office "supercentre" moved a step closer to reality last Tuesday night as the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) voted to proceed with a \$75,000 study of the idea.

The cost will be split three ways by the other two partners in this potential venture — Halton Region and the Halton District School Board — with an eye on reporting back next spring.

In broad strokes, the concept is one that involves the creation of a major multi-use campus on the Bronte Road property currently occupied by Halton regional headquarters as well as adjacent land that's up for sale. If it comes to pass, the site would be a central location that encompasses everything from both school boards to Halton region (including police and paramedic services).

At last Tuesday's HCDSB meeting, Education Director Lou Piovesan set the tone for debate when he characterized this idea as one of the most serious issues the board will deal with this year. Although it's at the "very preliminary" stage, said Superintendent of Facility Management Services Giacomo Corbacio, the project could prove to be an important step in solving overcrowding at the

board's five cramped administrative facilities (one of which is to be sold) and save taxpayers money through a host of efficiencies.

According to Superintendent of Business Services and Treasurer Paul McMahon, work to date clearly indicates "significant potential capital and operating cost savings."

These could be realized three ways, starting with shared facilities such as the mailroom and council chamber/board rooms etc. Business support services would range from centralized purchasing to facilities management. Shared "core" business service opportunities include legal, human resources and other areas such as finance and technology.

This Joint Accommodation Opportunities Strategy, as it's officially titled, actually marks an ambitious continuation of studies already being carried out by the three partners. The HCDSB's ongoing feasibility study, for example, offered several options in addition to the central campus, including a new building at the existing Drury Lane site or an office on Regional Road 25 between highways 401 and 407. The joint site being proposed, said Mr. Corbacio, is as "close as we could have hoped for" to the latter location.

Last Tuesday, Burlington trustee Bob Van de Vrande opened the dis-

ussion by saying he was concerned about the speed with which the process is moving, especially considering the costs which he said could be "huge." He also said he didn't want the business case to override Catholicity.

Oakville Trustee Ed Viana picked up on these concerns but balked at approving phase two of the study that night, preferring further discussions about the wisdom of proceeding and spending \$25,000. "It's a very giant step we're doing," he said. "I don't want to lose our identity."

Mr. Corbacio replied by saying he fully appreciates these concerns but assured Mr. Viana that pains will be taken throughout the process to address them.

"This is an opportunity to start from scratch and do it right," he said.

Mr. Piovesan tried to allay these fears by explaining there are many ways to halt the project at any point, but added that phase two is what's necessary to fully investigate the pros and cons of the concept.

"It's a study," he said. "You can still say no."

Waiting, however, could prove disastrous, said Mr. Bailey, who explained that the study is time-sensitive in that the land in question is up for sale.

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